

VOLUME NINE • NUMBER TWO • SUMMER 1988

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**The Jesuit Educational  
Center for Human Development**

**Decision Making by Consensus**

**Confrontation by Friends Is Risky**

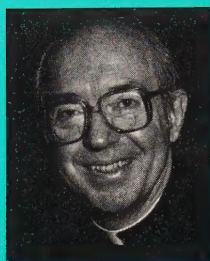
**Interpreting Experiences Reveals Beliefs**

**Communicating Through Ritual**

**When Charity Goes Awry**

Property of  
Graduate Theological Union  
JUL 20 1988

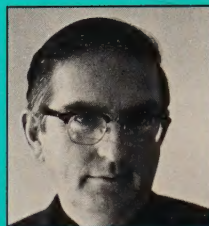




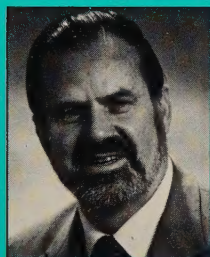
**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.**, is a priest and psychiatrist. He serves as a consultant to the Harvard University Health Services and to religious congregations, dioceses, formation personnel, and spiritual renewal centers throughout the world.



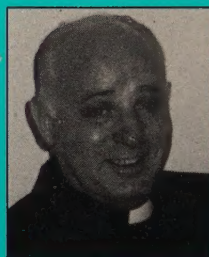
**EXECUTIVE EDITOR Linda Amadeo, R.N., M.S.**, is a nurse whose clinical specialty is psychiatry. Ms. Amadeo has counseled and directed workshops for clergy and religious men and women in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Africa, India, Australia, Nepal, and Asia. She teaches at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy.



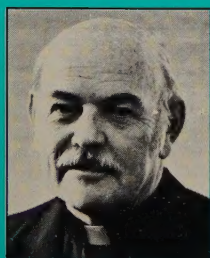
**SENIOR EDITOR William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.**, is a priest, author, spiritual director, and lecturer. Presently, he serves the New England Province of the Society of Jesus as assistant director of novices, in Boston, Massachusetts. In the past, Father Barry has been vice-provincial for formation, director of the Center for Religious Development, and professor of pastoral theology at Weston School of Theology.



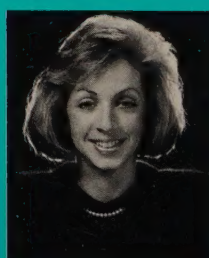
**SENIOR EDITOR Loughlan Sofield, S.T., M.A.**, is a General Councilor of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. He is co-director of the Trinity Ministries Center, Stirling, New Jersey. Brother Loughlan has conducted workshops on psychology and ministry in North and South America, Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia, and India.



**ASSOCIATE EDITOR John Carroll Futrell, S.J., S.T.D.**, is a priest, author, spiritual director, lecturer, and a former director of the Ministry Training Services, Denver. He is a visiting professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University and has directed religious renewal programs in the United States, Europe, the Far East, Australia, Africa, India, Sri Lanka, and Latin America.



**BOOK REVIEW EDITOR Jon J. O'Brien, S.J., D.O.**, is a priest, lawyer, and physician, board certified in psychiatry. He is Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Associate Dean at the Georgetown University School of Medicine, Washington, D.C. Father O'Brien is a member of the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus.



**PUBLICATION DIRECTOR Catherine T. Sullivan, M.S.**, a specialist in organizational management, is art director and coordinator of production of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

The quarterly journal Human Development (ISSN 0197-3096) is published by the Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development, 42 Kirkland St., Cambridge, MA 02138. This is a nonprofit organization established to be of service to persons involved in religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, pastoral care, and education. Subscription rate \$20.00 U.S. All other countries: \$27.00. Single copies \$7.00 in the U.S. & Canada. All other countries \$8.00. Second class postage paid in Boston and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send 3579 to Human Development, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. HD, Denville, NJ 07834. Copyright 1988 by Human Development. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Send new subscriptions, renewals, and change of address (please include mailing label if available) to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. HD, Denville, NJ 07834.

Letters to the editor and all other correspondence may be sent to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, 42 Kirkland Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. (617) 547-1250.



# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

---

## CONTENTS

---

6

**SELF-UNDERESTIMATING FORMATION PERSONNEL**

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C., M.A.

10

**THE FAMILY ALBUM**

James Torrens, S.J.

13

**PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF A SEARCH FOR TRUTH**

Mary Sheehan, R.S.M., Ph.D., and Barbara Wheeley, R.S.M., Ph.D.

17

**INTERPRETATION OF EXPERIENCES REVEALS BELIEFS**

William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.

21

**COMMUNICATING THROUGH RITUAL**

Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M., Ph.D.

27

**THE RISKY CONFRONTATION OF FRIENDS**

Leonard Schwartzburd, Ph.D.

31

**WHAT I LEARNED AS A GENERAL COUNCILLOR IN ROME**

Maureen P. Flood, S.S.S.

35

**WHEN CHARITY GOES AWRY**

Eric Griffin-Shelley, Ph.D., and Kenneth R. Sandler, M.D.

41

**DECISION MAKING BY CONSENSUS**

Nancy Conway, C.S.J., M.S.W., and Jean Alvarez, Ed.D.

---

2

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

3

**EDITOR'S PAGE**

Tuning Up Brains for Tomorrow

5

**AUTHORS IN THIS ISSUE**

47

**BOOK REVIEWS**

---



# EDITORIAL BOARD

## HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

JAMES J. GILL, S.J., M.D.

### EXECUTIVE EDITOR

LINDA D. AMADEO, R.N., M.S.

### SENIOR EDITOR

LOUGHLAN SOFIELD, S.T., M.A.

### SENIOR EDITOR

WILLIAM A. BARRY, S.J., Ph.D.

### ASSOCIATE EDITOR

JOHN CARROLL FUTRELL, S.J., S.T.D.

### BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

JON O'BRIEN, S.J., D.O.

### MANAGING EDITOR

SUSAN B. WALKER

### PUBLICATION DIRECTOR

CATHERINE T. SULLIVAN

## INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

The editors are pleased to consider for publication articles relating to the ongoing work of those involved in helping other people through religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, and counseling.

Manuscripts should be submitted in duplicate to the Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, 42 Kirkland St., Cambridge, MA 02138. Copy should be typewritten double spaced on 8½ × 11 inch white paper, 70 characters per line and 28 lines per page. Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 pages) with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide names of author(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Illustrations, if any, should be submitted as high-quality, glossy, unmounted black-and-white photographic prints. Do not send original artwork.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Book reviews, which should not exceed 600 words in length, should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Jon O'Brien, S.J., D.O., Jesuit Community, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.

Unaccepted manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Editorial Office: (617) 547-1250

Reverend George Aschenbrenner, S.J.

Reverend John Blewett, S.J.

Reverend Michael J. Buckley, S.J.

Reverend William J. Connolly, S.J.

Sister Marian Cowan, C.S.J.

Most Reverend John Cummins, D.D.

Reverend Angelo D'Agostino, S.J., M.D.

Reverend Patrick Doyle, S.J.

Meyer Friedman, M.D.

Ronald A. Grant, M.D., D. Min, N.C.Psy.A.

Very Reverend Howard Gray, S.J.

Rabbi Earl Grollman

Sister Anselm Hammerling, O.S.B.

Brenda L. Hermann, M.S.B.T.

Daniel E. Jennings, D.S.W.

Most Reverend James P. Keleher, D.D.

Sister Eileen Kelly, S.S.A.

Reverend Edward Malatesta, S.J.

His Eminence Carlo Cardinal Martini, S.J.

Reverend Dominic Maruca, S.J.

Reverend Cecil McGarry, S.J.

J. Fenton McKenna, J.D.

Reverend Daniel M. Merrigan, S.J.

Reverend Paul Molinari, S.J.

Sister Joanne Moore, C.H.M.

John R. Moran, Jr., J.D.

Reverend John T. Murray, S.J., M.D.

Reverend John O'Callaghan, S.J.

Reverend Edward M. O'Flaherty, S.J.

Reverend Timothy Quinlan, S.J.

Brother Charles Reutemann, F.S.C.

Sister Mary Elaine Tarpy, S.N.D. deN.

Reverend Gordon Tavis, O.S.B.

Robert J. Wicks, Psy.D.

Brother James R. Zullo, F.S.C.



---

# EDITOR'S PAGE

---

## TUNING UP BRAINS FOR TOMORROW

**H**ave you ever thought about getting your brain "tuned up"? The possibility never entered my mind until I saw in *The New York Times* a few weeks ago an ad focused on a gentleman named John-David, Ph.D., a "neuroscientist" (from California, of course) who conducts seminars and operates a chain of "Brain/Mind Salons" to help people improve their "brain fitness." He promises, for a sizable fee, to boost his clients' concentration, creativity, and memory. His crowning guarantee is "even the eliminating of old self-sabotage patterns."

After reading his ad (on a TWA flight from St. Louis to Boston) I tried to guess what specific cognitive habits John-David might be pledging himself to eradicate. I figured that any sort of self-disparaging, pessimistic, or cynical mode of thinking could be regarded as potentially harmful to self and thus presumably eligible for neuroscientific extermination. But before I could imagine any other possible forms of mental self-maiming, I was distracted by a conversation between the middle-aged man and the vivacious young woman sitting just to my right. She was telling him that she attended a state university and would soon have to commit herself to a field of specialization. Business, hotel management, and nursing all appealed to her, she said. His reply was, "I have a daughter your age. I told her, whatever you do don't go into nursing. The newspapers keep reporting that nurses all over the country are complaining. They don't get enough pay; their working conditions are poor; they have too much paperwork to do; doctors don't treat them

with enough respect; they can't get the time schedule they want. No wonder there's such a shortage of nurses."

The man's advice matched a statement made by a parent I had met at a workshop a few days earlier. He told me, "I wouldn't want my son to enter a seminary today. I was reading about a study that showed that most young priests are experiencing more stress, are less satisfied with their work, are not as sure about persevering, and are feeling more uncertain about what it means to be a priest than the older priests are. It doesn't surprise me that seminaries are attracting so few."

The "brain tune-up" ad and those remarks about nurses and priests reminded me of what I so often hear about teachers these days—that their classes are too large, the pay inadequate, pupils unmotivated, and their profession underappreciated. "I'm glad I didn't decide to become a teacher," a young man in his late twenties told me recently. "You'd have to be crazy to go into teaching," he added.

With my eyes shut and head tilted back on an undersized TWA pillow, I stopped listening to the conversation on my right, thought for a while, and then concluded that we Americans do indeed need somebody's help, if not John-David's, to rid ourselves of a lot of illogical and very destructive thinking. I see us making two mistakes. The first is to pay too much attention to statistics. They certainly don't tell the whole story. It might be true that the majority of nurses, young priests, or teachers are finding it difficult to achieve a state of contentment in their chosen vocation, but there are also a large number who are well suited for their tasks, who perform them joyfully and effectively, and who wouldn't trade their careers for the world. These are the professionals whom adults, including parents and other advisors, should be encouraging young people to consider joining, if God has given

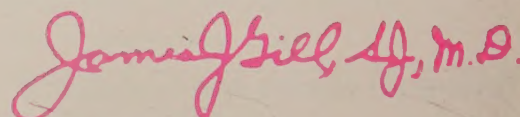


them the talent, inclination, courage, and generosity to choose such a challenging occupation.

Second, there is no doubt about the existence of an urgent need for improvement inside the professions of nursing and teaching and within the ordained priesthood. But if career-seeking young women and men decide to ignore these traditional Christian vocations just because many people experience them as frustrating and discouraging, there will be no one bringing new life into these crucial endeavors. What all three of these fields are currently awaiting is an influx of realistic, energetic, and altruistic young people who will dedicate themselves to learning the problem-solving skills needed to renew the vitality and morale of these professions. In other words, instead of discouraging the young, we ought to be saying, "Go in there, if you have the heart for it, and with God's help bring about the changes that will make your profession a much better one because you are investing your life in it."

I'm still not quite sure what it is that John-David, with his "neuroscience," does to people to "tune up" their brains. But I'm glad he put his ad in *The New York Times*. He reminds us that we can re-

model our thinking so that it is less negativistic and more constructive, less skewed by statistics and more logical and hopeful, with possibly enormous benefit to ourselves and others throughout our world. The next time you hear somebody say something like, "I wouldn't want my sons or daughters to go into politics; most politicians are just plain sleazy," I hope you'll hear yourself replying, "If that's what they want to do and God has given them the ability to do the job, to contend with the difficulties, and to make life better for everyone around, it would be nothing less than diabolical on your part to throw cold water on their dreams."



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

## Personality Type Accounts for Risk Taking

**P**ychologist Frank Farley, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin, has done for risk-taking teenagers what Meyer Friedman, M.D., did for heart-attack-prone Type A individuals; he has coined a new name for them. It's "Type T," the "T" standing for thrills. Farley's study, reported recently at a conference on risk taking, at the National Institute of Mental Health, revealed that it is the Type T teens who are most likely to engage in heavy drinking or drug abuse, get into fights at the drop of a hat, indulge in unrestrained sexual activity, and race cars at perilous speeds.

As explained by Alison Bass in *The Boston Globe*, "Farley hypothesizes that Type T children have physiological systems—heart rates, skin temperatures, sweat glands—that are slower to respond to external stimulation. As a result, these people spend their lives seeking the thrills they need to feel stimulated." In other words, Farley speculates, a Type T's senses are chronically understimulated.

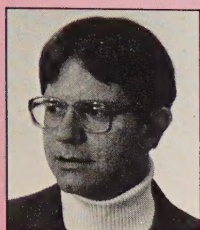
Up to 30 percent of adolescents are Type T. In a study of 1,000 Type T people, researchers found that risk-taking behavior is highest during late adolescence. It begins to climb at age ten, peaks between fourteen and nineteen, and begins to decline in the early twenties. But not all teenagers who act recklessly fall into the Type T category. Some take foolish risks because they had inadequate parenting or simply because they are following the example given by their risk-taking (e.g., heavy drinking, fast driving) parents.

Professor Farley sees Type T persons representing one extreme in a continuum of human behavior. At the opposite pole he finds people he calls the "little t" type—the shy, inhibited child who will do anything to avoid taking risks. Reports Bass, "Physiologically, they require comparatively low levels of stimulation and, in fact, may try to avoid taking risks in an effort to calm their hyperactive nervous system." Farley has discovered that people with "little t" personalities "prefer certainty and familiar situations and avoid variety and risk. They do best in a structured environment, where the teacher is completely in control and teaches at a fixed pace in a traditional classroom mode."

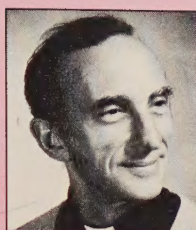
At the same Bethesda, Maryland, conference, Yale University Psychologist Stephen Reznik commented, "If parents, teachers, and counselors identified these [Type T] kids early on, they could rechannel these kids' energies into exciting, positive, and diverse experiences." Farley added, "There's no reason why thrill sports or outdoor adventures couldn't be as attractive as stealing a car or breaking into somebody's house." He said he also found Type T teenagers more creative than other children, "possibly because they like the mental risks necessary for creative success." Type Ts "look for uncertainty, high risk, novelty, variety, complexity, high intensity, and conflict . . . They do best in unstructured situations—open classrooms, for instance, where there's a lot of activity going on and a lot of interaction."



# AUTHORS IN THIS ISSUE



Joel Giallanza, C.S.C., M.A.



James Torrens, S.J.



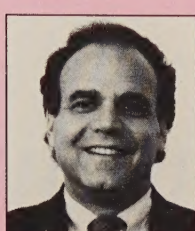
Mary Sheehan, R.S.M., Ph.D.



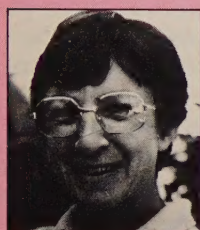
Barbara Wheeley, R.S.M., Ph.D.



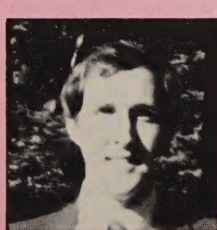
Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M., Ph.D.



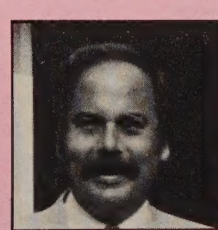
Leonard Schwartzburd, Ph.D.



Maureen Flood, S.S.S.



Eric Griffin-Shelley, Ph.D.



Kenneth R. Sandler, M.D.



Jean Alvarez, Ed.D.



Nancy Conway, C.S.J., M.S.W.



Phyllis Kaminski, S.S.N.D.



Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C.

**Brother Joel Giallanza, C.S.C., M.A.**, is a member of the provincial administration of the South-West Province of the Brothers of the Holy Cross. He has responsibility for formation and corporate renewal.

**Father James Torrens, S.J.**, is Professor of English at Santa Clara University, California.

**Sister Mary Sheehan, R.S.M., Ph.D.**, is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Chicago, Illinois.

**Sister Barbara Wheeley, R.S.M., Ph.D.**, is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Baltimore, Maryland.

**Father Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M., Ph.D.**, has extensive anthropological research experience of religious life. He is the cultural anthropology lecturer at the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Ateneo University, Manila.

**Leonard Schwartzburd, Ph.D.**, is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Berkeley, California. He also serves on the staff of the Meyer Friedman Institute in San Francisco.

**Sister Maureen Flood, S.S.S.**, is a spiritual director, broadcaster, and writer, living in Newton, a suburb of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

**Eric Griffin-Shelley, Ph.D.**, is a clinical psychologist on the Adolescent Alcohol Treatment Service at the Fairmount Institute, in Philadelphia.

**Kenneth R. Sandler, M.D.**, is Medical Director of the Fairmount Institute and Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia.

**Jean Alvarez, Ed.D.**, is a psychologist and organizational consultant who works with religious congregations in the areas of social justice and chapter preparation.

**Sister Nancy Conway, C.S.J., M.S.W.**, is a member of the executive team of the Congregation of St. Joseph of Cleveland and a consultant to religious congregations, particularly in relation to chapter preparation and facilitation.

**Sister Phyllis Kaminski, S.S.N.D.**, is a doctoral candidate at the Toronto School of Theology, Ontario, Canada.

**Brother Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C.**, is Director of the Commission on Faith and Order, of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.



# Self-Underestimating Formation Personnel

JOEL GIALLANZA, C.S.C., M.A.

**F**ormation is an interdisciplinary ministry. Its components include theology, Scripture studies, spirituality, developmental psychology, life planning and career counselling, and the heritage and practices of religious congregations. Many religious communities use teams at all levels of formation, since no one person will be sufficiently skilled in all of these areas. Formation teams complement their skills by participating in intercommunity programs through which they communicate with an entire network of resource persons and thereby create a wide array of supportive activities.

The skills and sensitivities necessary for contemporary formation ministry are not limited to the components cited here. The formator's personality, experience, and image of religious life contribute to the general effectiveness of formation programs. The interdisciplinary nature of formation, combined with the human dimension, produce what could be called the "underestimations" of formation personnel. This refers to experiences in which formators underrate their ability, performance, and impact in ministry.

In this article I will examine four such underestimations, drawing on my experiences in formation ministry and on those of other formators representing several religious communities. My hope is to support and to affirm those religious presently engaged in this ministry and to encourage those preparing to enter it.

## SOME UNDERESTIMATE COMPETENCE

Formation personnel often underestimate their competence. This is not without some cause. Most

religious, upon seeing the list of components that opened this article, would probably investigate the basic elements of several other ministries before ranking formation among their ministerial interests. Major superiors readily acknowledge the difficulty of finding religious who are willing to consider formation ministry as a possibility. Formation personnel themselves, even after several years in ministry, experience gaps between their skills and what they believe or perceive they are called on to do. The main frustration of this experience comes from feeling inadequate, questioning (sometimes doubting) one's ability to be a formator.

Formation personnel must reaffirm that their religious community has chosen them for, prepared them for (it is hoped), and entrusted them with, this ministry; that such a choice was not made without reflection by those in authority; and that the community trusts them to complete their tasks to the best of their ability. This does not deny the value of the many programs and workshops designed to be of support and assistance to formators. In fact, such programs and workshops should be a regular part of their continuing education and professional development.

At the same time, it must be insisted on that no program or workshop can replace actual involvement in the ministry of formation. Experience is the best training here, since each group of persons being formed has a personality all its own. The theories and practical suggestions presented in a program or workshop cannot be indiscriminately applied to every group. There are similarities among groups, but each one brings some surprises.

The competence of formation personnel is rooted,



in part, in the technical and pastoral studies and practices related to this ministry. The major part of competence, however, is found in the wisdom, common sense, and insight that come from ministering in formation. Feelings of inadequacy may stem from a lack of learning or experience. But such feelings frequently emerge with the realization that formation ministry involves touching the sacred within another person. That realization is evidence of God's incarnation: he continues the mission of his Son and he calls others to follow his Son through human instrumentality. Acceptance of this truth constitutes the primary competence of formation personnel.

### **INTUITION UNDERVALUED**

Formation personnel often underestimate the value of intuition. The ministry of formation involves a multitude of intangibles. Admittedly, there are some specific behaviors and activities that can and should be expected of those who are seriously undertaking incorporation into religious life. Nevertheless, the attitudes and approaches underlying those behaviors and activities are essential to the integrity with which religious life is lived. Determining and evaluating the fidelity to routine behaviors and activities is much more tangible than uncovering the integrity and honesty of attitudes and approaches. The main frustration that follows on underestimating intuition results in second-guessing. Formators make minor and major decisions that directly affect the lives of others. Second-guessing those decisions consumes much time and energy that could be directed toward the continuing development of the candidates and novices.

Formation personnel must reaffirm the value and function of their intuition. It is not infallible, but intuition can afford formators another perspective on the personalities and motivations of those seeking incorporation. Intuition can be especially helpful during evaluative periods. What is revealed during those periods is sometimes less significant than what the candidates or novices choose *not* to reveal about themselves. Intuitive insights can assist formation personnel to reach behind superficial revelations and to facilitate continued growth. Candidates and novices will not always agree with everything that is said during the evaluations. Formators must listen attentively and respectfully to points of disagreement and yet realize that disagreement does not automatically signal the inaccuracy of their intuition and their observations.

By definition, intuition is the art or faculty of knowing without the use of rational processes. Formators may not always have "hard facts" with which to indisputably demonstrate a particular point; logical and rational processes are less applicable without facts. Subsequently, formators may hesitate to make the point, and then its usefulness

---

## **Of all the internal ministries in religious life, formation is ranked among those that bear direct responsibility for shaping the future**

---

diminishes as time passes. There are no formulas for calculating the accuracy of intuition; however, consistency may come the closest. When formation personnel experience some issue or situation with the same intuition repeatedly, then it is important to explore that issue or situation with the candidates and novices. The goal here is not to confirm the intuition of formators, but to discover the truth for the good of the candidates and novices.

The value of intuition lies not only in the knowledge that comes through it but also in the sensitivity toward, listening to, and compassion for the candidates and novices that accompany that knowledge. The ministry of formation necessarily involves the process of assisting others to discover the Lord's presence and activity in their lives. Formation personnel must call upon all of their innate and learned abilities in providing that assistance. Learning to trust—or at least to take seriously—the information that comes through intuition is grounded in the conviction that the Lord works through human means, that he works through formators to draw candidates and novices ever closer to himself.

### **FORMATORS DEPRECIATE IMPACT**

Formation personnel often underestimate their impact on the candidates and novices. Effectiveness in formation ministry is not readily measurable in terms of tangible results. Though behaviors may be altered and specific practices may be adopted, the "results" of formation are primarily intangible and not immediately observable. True, attitudes and motivations must find expression eventually in everyday life; it is important, therefore, for formators to recognize the difference between those candidates and novices who are merely



---

## Formation ministry involves touching the sacred within another person

---

seeking approval by going through the motions and those who are genuinely seeking to embrace the responsibilities of religious life. Recognizing that difference is a significant part of the impact of formation personnel. Underestimating this impact results in the frustration of questioning one's effectiveness as a minister.

Formation personnel must reaffirm the importance of their presence and role in the lives of candidates and novices. That importance may not be acknowledged by the candidates and novices, or experienced by the formators themselves, or appreciated by the community. Still, formation personnel hold a privileged position in the lives of those seeking incorporation. The church has consistently maintained the irreplaceable nature and function of that position.

The impact of formation personnel is usually not immediate. Years after initial formation, religious begin to discover the wisdom inherent in the principles and practices that were emphasized during their candidacy or novitiate. Formators may equate this natural lapse of time with ineffectiveness on their part. Consequently, haunting questions emerge: "What could or should have been done differently?" "Did we forget to do something?" "Did we do our best?" "Are these individuals really ready for commitment to religious life?" "Do we belong in this ministry?"

The impact of formation personnel is rooted not so much in their answers to those questions but in their willingness to be passageways through which the Lord does his work. The ways of the Lord are not confined to human formulas and programs. Formators may do the Lord's work, but the Lord maintains his own timetable. It is characteristic of formators to wonder if anything is happening, if they are accomplishing something, if they are making a difference in the lives of the candidates and novices. The impact of formation personnel lies not

in successful programs or large profession groups, but in recognizing and facilitating the Lord's work in the candidates and novices, and in assisting them to respond generously to that work.

### MINISTRY AFFECTS FORMATORS

There is a complementary side of the preceding underestimation: formation personnel often underestimate the impact that the ministry is having on them. Formators do have an impact, however delayed and subtle, on the candidates and novices. The reverse is equally true. Whereas this reverse impact may not be so delayed, it is more subtle than the other. Formation personnel may not be aware of any effects that the ministry is having on their lives. Lack of awareness, however, does not confirm the absence of any effects. What is frustrating in connection with this underestimation is the feeling of distance from the mainstream of the community. Formation takes place in a specialized environment; after several years in this ministry, formators begin to wonder if they are capable of merging into the mainstream once again.

Formation personnel must reaffirm that the ideals and heritage that they pass on to the candidates and novices are a continuing source of renewal in their own life. Formators tend to be idealists, enthusiastic about their community in particular and about religious life in general. Their idealism is not blind to the common warts and weaknesses that candidates and novices inevitably notice and point out. Those just entering religious life will recognize inconsistencies between principles and life-styles; formators will see the extent of those same inconsistencies more clearly.

In addition to their everyday responsibilities in ministry, formation personnel serve on committees, attend a variety of community meetings, and participate in chapters. Occasionally, these involvements contribute to the feeling of distance from the mainstream. Formators may step back from these involvements, look at the community, and wonder, "Can the candidates and novices being formed really become a part of this?" "Can we really be a part of it?" This feeling of distance has one of two causes or a combination of both. First, it may come from within formators themselves. As they reflect on the clarification and intensification of values experienced in their ministry, formators question the quality of life they will experience after their term in this ministry. "Can we be a 'normal,' ordinary part of the community?" Second, the feeling of distance may come from without, from community members. At community meetings, and sometimes even at social gatherings, formation personnel encounter disparaging comments about the value of contemporary methods of formation. "That's not the way it was done in the 'good old days!'" Or, formation is given less than full recog-



tion as an engaging ministry: "You're in formation work, but what's your *regular* ministry?"

The impact of formation ministry on formation personnel stems from the grace of transformation that is always operative. This grace touches the candidates and novices who receive it as well as the formators who serve as its conduit. Everyone involved in the formation process is being formed, in varying degrees and for different purposes. As formation personnel continue their ministry, they must take up the challenge of knowing that they are being affected while not knowing exactly how or to what extent. They must remain open to the grace of transformation that comes to them through the very ideals, practices, programs, and activities by which they strive to lead the candidates and novices toward transformation.

### FORMATORS SHAPE FUTURE

Of all the internal ministries in religious life, formation is ranked among those that bear direct responsibility for shaping the future. The decisions

made by formation personnel and the profile of individuals approved for initial and final incorporation are the basic ingredients of religious life tomorrow and fifteen, twenty, and twenty-five years from tomorrow. The seriousness of this responsibility should not be a source of panic for formators, but a source of frequent prayer.

In prayer, formation personnel discover the means to move beyond the debilitating effects of underestimations and consequent frustrations. Primary among the means to be discovered is the assurance that they are not alone in their ministry but are co-responsible with the Lord. The Lord provides whatever graces are necessary for the effectiveness of the formation process; formators provide the human channel through which those graces complete the Lord's work.

Whatever the challenges confronting formation personnel, whatever their experiences, the Lord must never be underestimated. As his co-workers, they can pray with confidence: "Lord, you will give us prosperity, for all of our accomplishments are truly your doing" (Is 26:12).

## Pentecostals May Attract "Type T" People

**T**he psychological research discussed at a recent National Institute of Mental Health conference in Bethesda, Maryland, may have unintendedly shed considerable light on the question as to why so many Christians are leaving the mainline churches and joining the Pentecostals. In 1958 there were 12 million Pentecostals in the world. By 1978 they had grown to 60 million. In the past decade, their numbers have exploded to a stunning 277 million. Watching this movement manifest an annual growth rate of 14.8 percent, some sociologists are predicting that by the end of the present century Pentecostalism will be the dominant form of Christianity in the world.

News writer Clark Marrow, in *The Winnipeg Free Press*, suggests that the Pentecostal form of worship, which provides excitement that comes with "speaking in tongues" and seeing people "slain in the spirit," appeals strongly to individuals who are "simply bored with mainline churches." Their highly emotional services, so familiar to those who watch television evangelists on the PTL cable network, offer an opportunity for intense affective—not just cognitive—participation.

Perhaps it is this appeal to emotionality that is now attracting Latin Americans (almost all of them Catholics) to convert to Pentecostalism at a rate of four hundred every hour, in Central and South America.

The mental-health conference mentioned above brought to light the findings of researcher-psychologist Frank Farley, of the University of Wisconsin, that perhaps as many as 30 percent of Americans have a Type T personality. These are individuals whose physiology—probably because of their genetic inheritance—predisposes them to seek excitement and to take more risks than others. They require high levels of stimulation in order to feel animated, so their lives are characterized by thrill seeking and a thirst for strong affective experiences. Farley, in Bethesda, pointed out some of the implications of the Type T child in relation to parenting and education. It seems obvious that church leaders and liturgists, especially, ought to give serious consideration to Farley's findings, if they are alarmed (as they ought to be) by the statistics presented above. (Turn to page four for more about the Type T personality).



"Dust"

Dust, how you do fly up  
veil lifts at a touch  
from the floppy album

Olga, Bea, in white  
dresses and broad hats  
hair clipped and black,  
Carlo under his boater  
eyes shaded, the chaperone

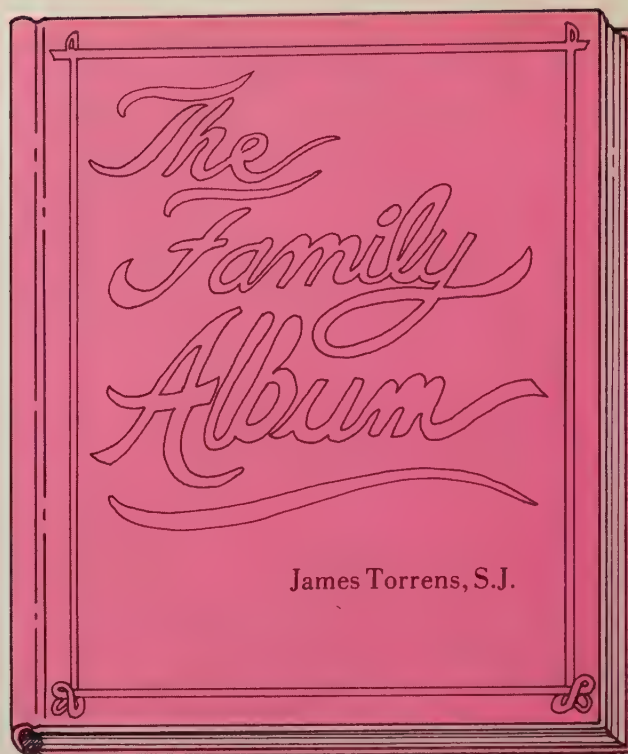
each locus cleanly identified —  
Mentone, Venice—in white ink  
Whose hand?

The Family. in deck chairs  
leaning close, upon running boards  
sprawling in composition

Dust, you are man,  
woman, clustering  
no two alike  
alloys of mischief  
and a high intent

like Uncle Charlie's five  
composed a moment in short  
pants or the girl tots  
my father's hefting  
in the wheelbarrow where  
you can just see Jackie's  
white snout

If you withdraw, spirit  
we return to dust.  
Never. Shot through with burning.  
Remember, dust.



**F**or years a scene has stayed with me from Katherine Ann Porter's great family story "Old Mortality." Miranda, a young woman who has recently eloped, is traveling back by train to her family's home town for her Uncle Gabriel's funeral. With her is Cousin Eva. Poor Cousin Eva, utterly homely, has been the butt of family jokes for years. In her long monologue to Miranda, she lets all her bitterness gather and come out. When they had made fun of her they were all so amusing, she recollects. " 'No harm meant—oh, no, no harm at all. That is the hellish thing about it. It is that I can't forgive,' she cried out, and she twisted her hands together as if they were rags. 'Ah, the family,' she said, releasing her breath and sitting back quietly, 'the whole hideous institution should be wiped from the face of the earth. It is the root of all human wrongs,' she ended, and relaxed, and her face became calm." Cousin Eva's indictment seems final and definitive. But when the two of them descend at the station platform to be met by Miranda's father, it is Eva who falls right in with him, pleasantly and affectionately, as if forgetting what she had just said; and he, ignoring his errant daughter, greets her warmly.

"Ah, the family!" Who has not thought that? It sometimes seems the epitome of the mixed blessing. Hostilities small or large, bewilderment for



years, a sort of inarticulate resentment, coexist with genuine affection, forgivable pride, deep satisfaction. The novelist has a way of celebrating this complexity, often with a wry smile, as we have just seen. Some writers, like Thomas Wolfe, can never get far enough outside the network of their own experience to be at ease with it and to get it fully into perspective. Others, like James Agee in *A Death in the Family*, more accurately chronicle the tensions and sorrows, the tenderness and courage, of their own people. Most of us, in what we think or say about the family, draw closer to the professional storyteller than to the battery of experts who are in print today generalizing about it. We engage in oral history, which we often color in the interests of nostalgia or waspish humor.

There is still a strong tendency to make a cult of The Family. In a world that, to its aging members, seems ever more ruthless, nonreligious, and pornographic, no wonder that some quarters react with a loud call back to "family values." What might these family values be? Loyalty among family members, common interests, mutual concern, ease and affection, readiness to help out in emergencies—all these should be on the list. To the young, "family" also implies a certain discipline; and to all, a code of religious practice, which is a piety and an ethic in one.

Family is a formidable reality. Males, when they hear a feminist lament that women are kept so powerless, think to themselves about the formative power of their mothers and mutter, "Give me a break." Women, for their part, remember growing up under a double standard or marrying into a quasicorporation and mutter back, "Give me a break." There are many caricatures, or distortions, of family loyalty (just as there are many possible versions of *The Godfather*); there are stifling family pieties and harsh disciplines; and the whole notion of family property carries an electric charge—so "family" can be as loaded as well as a richly suggestive term.

Suddenly we are back to Cousin Eva and her outburst, and to Miranda and her ostracism, both of which derived from Katherine Ann Porter's marital history, her fierce independence, and her rankling anger. Sigmund Freud was able to give credit to the novelists for preceding, with their remarkable insight, the formulations of psychology (see Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, Hazard Adams, ed.). The decades since "Old Mortality" have seen a flood of treatises on the family, training a glaring light upon all that is problematic and oppressive. Probably none of these is more scathing than *The Death of the Family*, by the English psychiatrist David Cooper, appearing in the early 1970s. Cooper indicted the family structure for the way it forces people, supposedly, to define themselves as mir-

ror images of others. In setting forth roles and personality models with unmistakable sharpness, the family, he thought, does not leave the individual any room to be such.

Cooper's outcry of distaste, culminating in a "Last Will and Testament" where absolutely nothing was to be left to the family, proceeded from clinical experience of the sufferings of people whose parents or families never gave them a chance. It also, however, had Sartrean, or existentialistic, implications, i.e., that we are to be the formers and creators of ourselves. This is a very unsocial view of reality. Biologically, sociologically, and religiously it is inconceivable that we not be formed in a family. The family is an environment of people conveying to us the habits and attitudes, and eliciting the affections and attachments, that are crucial to being human.

## FAMILIES FOSTER MATURITY

The human being, in the process of growth, is called to mature within some sort of family confines. Maturing is a process of becoming an individual, taking responsibility for ourselves before God—but not in isolation from others. The challenge, actually, is to become somebody within a circle of humans, taking stock of ourselves vis à vis others, forming and asserting convictions in the process of hot debate, often daring things that the protective scheme does not easily allow for. As we think back on our families, we need to be frank, not nostalgic, not ready to gloss over the shortcomings, sometimes grave, sometimes even crippling. But we find ourselves impelled also to recognize and celebrate those genuine marks of attention, all the fostering of our gifts, that took place there. In some cases the neglect or mistreatment will have been, perhaps, criminal; but that is not the rule. It takes only an hour or two in the company of a young family to be reminded how much nurturing, what exhausting attention, a young human being requires moment by moment. To take all of that for granted, write it off, would seem the epitome of thanklessness.

Humor, no doubt, is essential to dealing with the experience of family. Katherine Ann Porter had it. Family lore is full of it. Sex, romance, slowness in learning, blockages in growing up, misunderstandings—all have their funny side. Bill Cosby has built on that. "Smile, this is going to hurt," he often seems to say. Dolores Curran, writing and lecturing widely among U.S. Catholics, conveys a very positive image of family life by her wit, which she applies to wide domestic experience. Perhaps we chuckle at the aphorism "Family are people you wouldn't choose for friends"? We do so, not, please God, for lack of friends among our relatives. It is because difficult people have a way of sticking in the ones around



them like splinters. But these provocative people, the ones you have trouble dealing with, carry their own special value. They clarify issues for you, they try your patience, they can even bring home some unwelcome truth.

The concept of religious institutes as families has been around for a long time. Those with some experience of religious life can attest to stifling situations, to the suffering caused by "in groups," and to survival by humor as well. Ignatius of Loyola is still felt by many to be a stern patriarchal force; this image of him, where it persists, will not quickly yield to argument. Ignatius did certainly insist upon detachment from the family—the family of status and means. In a world run by the noble families, exerting their very strong pull, there was ample reason, originally, to limit one's contact. An appreciation of freedom of choice and mature decision was high among the qualities of Ignatius. If religious families, over the centuries, took on some of that shadow aspect of the controlling family, this was and is a condition calling for remedy. But an idyllic final condition is hardly to be expected, for tensions between the individual and the group are bound to continue as long as either is viable, and can indeed be fruitful.

Family history on any level deserves to be well recorded; but it often takes some distancing—say into one's forties—before we can deal calmly enough with it. My earliest oral history notes begin in the early 1970s. Rereading them now I find my mother recalling that when she and her sisters were in high school (circa 1910) their mother used to read the letters they received. Often my mother was embarrassed to show the letters, she said, because of poor phrasing and spelling. Here am I now, in 1988, with years and years as a college English teacher, still chafing at the same thing among my students, and convinced that I have before me evidence of a New Dark Age! My mother also recalled that her mother did not want her older sister, my aunt Aimee, to enter the Religious of the Sacred Heart because their visiting rules were so strict, even in time of death, and because they oversheltered their members. This set up a tension within my aunt, a very determined person but one upon whom family values had been exerted strongly. Not until her mother's death four years later did she feel free to enter.

## HOME IMPLIES RELATIONSHIPS

Call the family an "institution," if you will; the truer picture is that of a live organism, and of throbbing people. Robert Frost, one expressive citizen of our century, had an excruciating experience of family, both as child and as parent. This is not reflected overtly in his poetry, which

does not deal openly with facts of his life. Nonetheless his effort to get the right perspective gave us his touching poem "The Death of the Hired Man." Silas, a wandering odd-jobs man, ignored over the years by his better-off brother, comes in his final days to seek refuge with a fruit grower who has employed him. "He has come home to die," the grower's wife says. The husband comments sardonically, "Home is the place, where, when you have to go there,/ they have to take you in." The wife corrects him: "I should have called it / something you somehow haven't to deserve."

Home, the true family place, in other words, is somewhere we belong. Numberless adults, it is undeniable, are conscious only of having been abused, abandoned, or unloved by those whose responsibility it was to nurture them. Homeless, familyless, in an affective way, they look and in fact yearn for better. Scarred as they are, can they hope to find it? Perhaps we need to say, above all, that the more experience one has of distortions, anguish, and ruptures within the family circle, the more effectively one is reminded that in the last analysis, only the "blessed community" is true family.

This reality, the "blessed community," or "communion of saints," by which, according to Thomas R. Kelley,\* "we overleap the boundaries of church membership [toward other] lives immersed and drowned in God," is by definition elusive, an object of faith. We live nonetheless for those moments when, as Kelley says, "with a 'chance' conversation we know that we have found and been found by another member of the Blessed Community." We connect with such people, perhaps even in a stable way. This becomes the underlying family of our lives, one to which "the incident of death puts no boundaries." We are family formers on a large scale, as an essential of our Christian vocation. Still, an important fact remains about this deepest of human callings: it is connected humbly to that inescapable and primal human project, the family. We take our origin and root, we derive our sense of the desirable society, from the flesh-and-blood family that, with a huge investment of energy and care, gives us our start. We draw our particularity there, and exercise it first of all there, and owe much love and attention to those who are there, even as we move to a wider communion, a more comprehensive human circle, the one in which God's love fully comprehends, or grasps, us.

\*Thomas R. Kelley, "The Blessed Community," an excerpt from *A Testament of Devotion* anthologized in *Endtime: The Doomsday Catalog*, ed. William Griffin (New York: Collier Books, 1979), 326.



# Psychological Aspects of a Search for Truth

MARY SHEEHAN, R.S.M., Ph.D., and BARBARA WHEELLEY, R.S.M., Ph.D.

**I**n "A Community's Search for Truth" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Spring 1988), Patricia Wolf detailed the theological elements of the process of the Communal Search for Truth conducted by the Sisters of Mercy of the Union during 1985 and 1986. This follow-up article presents the psychological dimensions of that process and offers reflections on the growth of our religious congregation from the perspective of current research on the psychology of women.

## IMAGES HIGHLIGHT FEELINGS

Recognizing that the individual grows in and through community or affiliation with others and that communal directions fare better where there is broad-based support, our general chapter sought the participation of every sister in the congregation in The Communal Search for Truth process. Focusing on our relationship with the church, the process was designed to assist community members in addressing the stressful situations that had developed among some Sisters of Mercy and church authorities. The process included all the major elements necessary to successful stress management: (1) awareness of the experiences that have led to the situation; (2) recognition and acceptance of one's feelings regarding the situation; and (3) development of new understanding and behaviors that enable more effective coping.

In the initial sessions sisters were invited to consider their recent experiences with respect to the Agnes Mary Mansour case and the Quinn Commis-

sion. They were asked how they felt when each situation became public, and what images or symbols were evoked by these events. An atmosphere of acceptance among participants prevailed, and many sisters said they were unaware of the intensity of their feelings until they looked at their images and heard the images and feelings of others.

Anger was the most frequently and intensely described feeling, usually directed at church authorities, sometimes at congregational leaders or members, occasionally at the media. Many expressed the powerlessness and anxiety of people who have been victimized or oppressed. Deep sadness and some alienation were also apparent. Occasionally, feelings of hope emerged, often identified through the application of our faith tradition to the present situations.

Images were strong and at times spoke more profoundly than words did. Some images repeated across several workshops were rape, tug of war, battered women, puppets and puppeteers, dead end, Peter and Paul, being caged, and nuclear blast. A vivid image for the Quinn Commission was that of "men on an island trying to run the church with no mechanism to communicate with the mainland." A vivid image for the Mansour case was, "someone breaks down my door during the night and comes and takes away a member of my family—as in Third World countries." Images focusing on the conflicts about authority were often parental: big daddy and little girl, children growing up with their father out of control, a spoiled child kicking a good parent. Some images represented



---

## As subordinates in the church institution, women have usually not been allowed open, productive forms of conflict

---

the death/resurrection theme: a tree pruned growing deeper roots, crushed grapes fermenting and producing wine. The hope evidenced in these images was also captured in others: a body of calm water with a bubbling spring that can't be capped; walls breaking down between us and other women, especially the oppressed.

The imaging process left participants with a mix of reactions: anger again, concern at the emergence of so much anger toward church authorities, wonder about the sisters who had not participated, a feeling of connectedness, eagerness to hear the theological input that would help us move beyond the "tug of war." It was interesting to note that people of substantially differing viewpoints often felt anger and frustration in common.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL GROWTH FACILITATED

The development of new understanding and behavior was encouraged by the contributions of both the theologians and the facilitators. The facilitators summarized the images, offered insights regarding the group dynamics and coping behavior, or inserted further work with imaging in an effort to assist participants in looking at both personal and communal implications. The aim was to pursue further our growing understanding of how experience, magisterial teaching, and theological reflection together move toward truth or true authority. When the anger could be seen as necessary and

possibly energizing, people were freer to be more creative in discussing future implications.

The effort to articulate norms for church-congregation interactions was the most difficult part of the workshop. Many sisters continued to experience the conflict between personal/communal integrity and their expectations that many in the church hierarchy will remain unwilling to listen to or address their concerns. Though no clear guidelines emerged, there was renewed commitment to the dialogic process, and an evolving sense that we have grown significantly in our ability to deal with the stress involved in a genuinely *communal* search for truth.

The Communal Search for Truth process was a significant moment in our community history. Here the community had the opportunity to reflect on its experience in recent years, broaden its understanding and skills in dealing with church-congregation issues, and gather support for future decision making. Reviewing the workshop from a psychologist's perspective, we found current research on the psychology of women to be helpful in understanding further the dynamics between women religious and the church hierarchy. The following areas of women's development seemed particularly important: establishment of a collective base of trust within the community; self-definition; management of anger and conflict; and our ability to take ourselves seriously, especially in moral decision making.

### TRUST STRENGTHENED

According to A.V. Mander and A.K. Rush, in *Feminism as Therapy*, "sharing personal concerns with other women establishes a collective base of trust...." The Communal Search for Truth process was one more step in the healing of old wounds inflicted on one another during the polarizing upheavals in religious life in the late sixties and early seventies. Strongly expressed feelings held in common strengthened the participants' bonding with one another and helped generate collective energy for a variety of new endeavors. By no means are we all in agreement; however, we have become more skilled over the years in our ability to articulate differences and negotiate more reasonably. The Communal Search for Truth process further developed our ability to trust that each of us is honestly searching and our understanding that we must respect both our own choices and those of others as we live our own truth. The strengthening of our collective base of trust, then, further enables us to offer and gather support as we continue to work together within the institutional church.

### SELF-DEFINITION REARTICULATED

The post-Vatican II renewal process has been an



ongoing effort to rearticulate our self-definition for today's times. In our efforts to do this well, we have become poignantly aware that we as church embody the same dominant/subordinate limitations that are present in society. The images repeatedly elicited regarding church-congregation interactions highlighted the awareness that we, like other women, have allowed ourselves to be defined by the dominant male culture. In her book *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, Jean Miller indicates that in a society aiming to keep this statement of inequality permanent, the following occur: (1) the dominant labels the subordinate as inferior; (2) the dominant assigns to the subordinate the unpleasant tasks while keeping the preferred tasks for itself; (3) the dominant states further that the subordinate is *unable* to perform the preferred tasks; and (4) the dominant determines what is "normal" for the culture. It is not the people in the dominant roles who tend to move society toward greater equality; rather, it must be the subordinate culture that becomes aware of its oppression and moves the society toward change.

Community members are growing in their awareness that although their experiences may be different from those of men, they are no less valuable in the search for truth. It was clear as we spoke with one another that we are no longer willing to be defined as inferior and that being patronized or discredited because we are women ignites our anger. This anger, however, only moves us on in our commitment to the self-defining process, preferably in a mutual and complementary relationship with church authorities.

## ANGER CAN BE CONSTRUCTIVE

Miller points out that "mutually enhancing interaction is not probable between unequals. Indeed conflict is inevitable." It is difficult for us to acknowledge sometimes that the same church we love and serve also hurts us and impairs our ability to be optimally effective. As subordinates in the church institution, women have usually not been allowed open, productive forms of conflict. We are left, then, with more painful, destructive forms of conflict that seem to bear no resolution, no satisfaction that progress has been made, and we become unwilling to initiate this painful struggle. No healthy person wants to suffer; however, we were able to remind ourselves that in our faith tradition we know that pain (the Cross) is often associated with growth, and like it or not, sometimes it will be *our* pain.

The anger expressed during The Communal Search for Truth process can be viewed as a healthy step in overcoming our more natural inclination to passivity. As Miller says, "Remaining in a powerless position can be a refuge from one's fearsome anger." Harriet Lerner, in *The Dance of Anger*, writes that being angry and accepting that anger is only

the starting point for constructive change; it can motivate us "to say 'no' to the ways in which we are defined by others and 'yes' to the dictates of our inner self." Lerner uses the image of a dance as she describes the way women can learn to use anger constructively: "We cannot make another person change his or her steps to an old dance, but if we can change our own steps, the dance no longer can continue in the same pattern."

In our relationships within the institutional church we would do well to keep in mind Lerner's basic skills for managing interpersonal anger: (1) tuning in to the true sources of our anger and clarifying where we stand; (2) developing good communication skills; (3) observing and interrupting nonproductive patterns of interaction; and (4) anticipating and dealing with countermoves or "change back!" reactions from others.

The Communal Search workshops demonstrated real growth in us as a group both in tuning in to feelings and in developing good communication skills, except perhaps as these relate to media coverage. Sharpening these skills will be an ongoing task. We are also beginning to discover how to interrupt our nonproductive patterns of interaction with the institutional church. Recent behavior, for example, reflected the recognition that approaching church authorities in isolation from other congregations on matters of self-definition is often nonproductive. Instead of studying political ministry and presenting it to our general chapter as the interest of our congregation only, the involvement of other congregations was elicited. Likewise, we chose to support by chapter resolution another congregation in its struggle for self-definition vis-a-vis opposing church authorities. The opposite side of the coin, i.e., not interrupting productive patterns of interaction, was defended during the workshops by those sisters who pointed out that our anger must not be directed at all bishops and priests in the church structure, since some are clearly supportive of our self-definitive moves.

Lerner's last point, anticipating and dealing with the reactions of others when they tell us behaviorally or in words to change back to the way we were, can be helpful in several ways. Creatively preparing for what others might do can strengthen the change process in ourselves. Attending to it at all helps us realize that those changes we make that others perceive as negative for them are predictably met by responses aimed at getting us to change back. Knowing this allows us to understand their response as a normal dynamic of change rather than as a personal attack. Determining our response to the countermoves is freer, then, if we do not feel so personally attacked. For example, if church authorities readily approve the constitutions of those congregations who see themselves as subordinate or submissive to church authorities and delay excessively with respect to those constitutions that



favor greater self-definition, congregations in the latter category need not get stuck in the anger that would be experienced if this were taken simply as a personal attack.

Managing anger with more creative energy does not exclude pain any more than managing conflict does. The many demands this kind of change entails for women, as described by Carolyn Osiek in *Beyond Anger: On Being a Feminist in the Church*, sound like a total stretching of the feminine self. She says that

[Woman's] need of relatedness and connectedness must at times be sacrificed in order to allow independent action. Her need for security and approval must be sacrificed in order to dare new ways of acting that may not win enthusiastic acceptance by those who have something to lose by it. Her need to be cherished and valued must be sacrificed in order that she may come to cherish and value herself and what she stands for. Her need to belong must be sacrificed so that she might make her full contribution to the church and thus belong to it as a fully responsible member. All this is Cross enough.

## SELF-RESPECT AFFIRMED

The Communal Search for Truth process was clearly an effort to take ourselves seriously as religious women, Sisters of Mercy. Our conflicts with church authorities have come when we chose to take our experiences and those of other women seriously in dealing with today's complex moral issues. As we attempt to enter into dialogue about these issues, the issue itself becomes clouded in the power struggle over whose "truth" will prevail. Carol Gilligan, in *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, suggests that men and women speak such different languages that even when the moral vocabulary overlaps, there is a great

"propensity for systematic mistranslation, creating misunderstandings which impede communication and limit the potential for cooperation and care in relationships." Workshop participants clearly recognized these limitations. In taking ourselves seriously, we recognize that we must be willing to speak our understanding of truth so it can be examined and elaborated by the larger community. The more fully developed we are as persons, the less defensive and more open to a range of insights and opinions we will be. At times the fear and passivity that often hamper women's development were evident, but there was also renewed energy to clarify what we are learning from our ministerial experiences and to collaborate more broadly with our lay, religious, and clerical colleagues in this effort.

"The hope for success lies in respectful engagement with other people," writes Miller. We know we are becoming skilled in "respectful engagement;" we take courage from one another and from our colleagues who do likewise. As the individual grows through community, so too, the congregation as a whole advances forward, takes new directions, makes decisions with as much clarity as possible, and together bears the pain as we continually search for truth.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Gilligan, C. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Lerner, H. *The Dance of Anger*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985.
- Mander, A., and A. Rush. *Feminism as Therapy*. New York: Random House, 1974.
- Miller, J. *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. 2d ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.
- Osiek, C. *Beyond Anger: On Being a Feminist in the Church*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.



# Interpretation of Experiences Reveals Beliefs

WILLIAM A. BARRY, S.J., Ph.D.

**A**nyone who leads workshops on spiritual direction frequently faces the question, "How does spiritual direction differ from counseling or psychotherapy?" Over the years I have developed a number of different answers, most of which point to the focus of the conversations between the two people involved. Thus, the person who asks for spiritual direction wants help with his or her relationship with God, so the focus of the conversations should be what happens when the person is in conscious relationship with God. On the other hand, a person who seeks psychological counseling asks help, for example, with relationships with peers at work, so the focus will be on what happens in such relationships. Recently, a remark by Richard Stanley, S.J., during a homily at Eastern Point Retreat House in Gloucester, Massachusetts, gave me a different slant on the subject. The insight may be of help to spiritual directors and to directees, although for simplicity of presentation I will write as if addressing only directors.

Suppose that you are directing a young man on a retreat, and on the third day he comes to see you and tells you about a dream he had the night before. In the dream, Jesus seemed to be saying something to him, and he was afraid. Jesus had a beard and was dressed in working clothes. He seemed intense. This is all that the retreatant remembers, but he thinks it important that he dreamt of Jesus at

this time in the retreat. How would you handle this?

Something like this happens in the story of Samuel and Eli in 1 Samuel 3, which was the first reading for the liturgy at the retreat house. Samuel is lying down sleeping and hears a voice calling his name. He presumes that Eli called and runs to Eli to ask what he wants. Eli tells him to go back to sleep; he did not call. This happens three times, and finally Eli tells Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" In effect, the boy has a dream, and Eli tells him to take it seriously and speak to the one who calls. Dick Stanley remarked, "What a fine spiritual director Eli was!"

## HUMAN EXPERIENCE MULTIDIMENSIONAL

Any human experience is multidimensional, as I have argued in an earlier article in *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* ("The Religious Dimension of Experience," Summer 1986). There I developed the ideas of John E. Smith on experience as encounter. Any human experience, says Smith, "is the many-sided product of complex encounters between what there is and a being capable of undergoing, enduring, taking note of, responding to, and expressing it. As a product, experience is a result of an ongoing process that takes time and has a temporal structure." With this definition as backdrop, I want to



look at the dream experience of the young retreatant in order to see why Eli could be described as a fine spiritual director.

Scientists of different kinds are interested in different dimensions of the dream experience. For our purposes I pass over the dimensions of this dream experience that would interest a physicist or a biologist. A neuropsychologist would concentrate on the brain patterns, the time of the dream, and the storage of long-term and short-term memory, all of which are dimensions of the experience. A physiological psychologist might also be concerned about what the dreamer ate or drank before sleeping and how long ago, his position in bed, the temperature of the room, etc. There is a physiological dimension to every human experience. Another kind of psychologist may want to examine the effects of the external environment, e.g., noises, touches, smells, on the dream experience. A sociologist might want to know the ethos of the retreat house for its effect on the dream and its memory. For example, is it common knowledge that directors in this retreat house (or this director) are interested in dreams? Have other retreatants talked about their dreams and what their directors made of them? There is a social dimension to every human experience.

I mention these different dimensions to indicate how multidimensional human experience is. I suspect that most spiritual directors would have little incentive to pursue any of these avenues. That directors so often want to discuss the difference between counseling and spiritual direction, however, indicates that they may frequently be tempted to pursue the psychological determinants of the experiences of their directees or may often be asked by directees for help in understanding these determinants. Here we need to tread more carefully.

## RELEVANCE IS CRUCIAL

In the dream, why was Jesus dressed in working clothes? Obviously there are multiple possibilities. The dreamer could have seen a picture of Jesus in which he was dressed as a modern-day carpenter. An older brother he admires very much may usually dress this way. He may have disliked pictures of Jesus wearing a long white gown because he thought they made Jesus look like a young woman. If the young man had come to a counselor for help with relationships, the counselor might well pursue the significance of the way Jesus is dressed in the dream. His relationship to the older brother or a dislike of pictures of Jesus in a long gown may be important to his present difficulties in relationships. Would a spiritual director want to pursue the psychological determinants of the way Jesus is dressed in the dream? Or the psychological determinants of the fact that Jesus is bearded? Here we come to the nub of the difference between spiritual direction and counseling. Just as a *skilled* psycho-

logical counselor would only pursue these determinants if they promise to have relevance to the presenting problem of the client, so too, a *skilled* spiritual director would only pursue them if such pursuit has relevance to the directee's relationship with the Lord.

## RELIGIOUS DIMENSION PURSUED

Notice that I have emphasized the word "skilled" in the comparison above. The psyche exerts a very strong attraction for us human beings; we find it endlessly fascinating to plumb its depths, especially in another person. The psyche is like a black hole that sucks up all our attention. To change the metaphor, we are like psychological voyeurs when it comes to trying to figure out the determinants of someone's behavior or dreams or fantasies. Probably part of the motivation for becoming a counselor comes from a desire to satisfy such an attraction. Not only that, but we may mistakenly believe that the counselor's or spiritual director's main job is to help the client to uncover the hidden determinants of experience. Whereas at least part of my motivation for becoming a counselor and a spiritual director may be to satisfy my attraction to plumbing the depths of the psyche, if I am to become a *skilled* professional at either or both, however, I will have to learn to subordinate that curiosity to the purposes of my clients. If I keep in the forefront of my mind and heart what they want, then either as counselor or spiritual director I will pursue, as much as possible, only what is relevant to their concerns. The purpose of training and supervision in counseling and spiritual direction is to help people to become skilled professionals who use their skills for the benefit of their clients, not themselves.

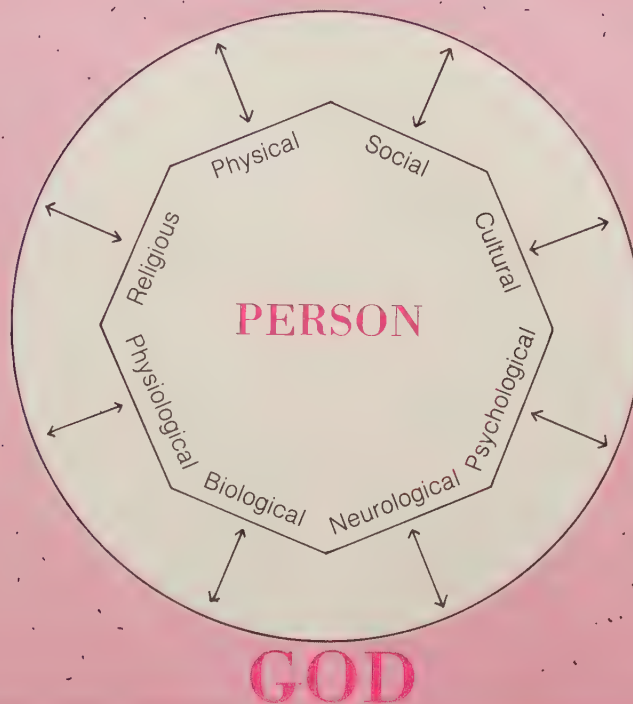
Thus, the skilled spiritual director pursues the psychological determinants of any experience of a directee only if such pursuit promises to help the directee engage more deeply in the relationship with the Lord. This statement presumes that the directee has sought out spiritual direction for this latter purpose, i.e., primarily to develop this relationship. This purpose, in turn, presumes that both director and directee believe that there is a religious dimension to human experience. They believe, in other words, that whatever else they encounter in their experience, they also encounter the Lord. And let me say quite bluntly that the proof of this belief is in the way directors and directees *act* in the face of experiences such as the young man's dream and not in what they say they believe. My hunch is that many directors often fail this test.

## GOD SEEKS ENCOUNTERS

Let's return to the story of Eli and Samuel. Why can we assert that Eli was a fine spiritual director? First of all, Eli believed, in practice, that the voice



# The Multidimensional Determinants of Personal Encounters With God



could be the voice of God; in other words, Samuel's experience, whatever other determinants it had, could also be an encounter with God. Second, he seemed to realize that the only way of finding out whether it was God's voice was to engage in the relationship. Eli told Samuel to go back to bed and, if the voice was heard again, to engage it directly. Now in fact, a skilled director might first help Samuel to examine his experience before returning to it. Samuel might be helped to describe the timbre of the voice, its emotional tone, etc., and to pay attention to his own emotional reactions when he heard the voice. In this way he would be helped to a preliminary discernment as to whether this voice might be of God. If he leans toward the conclusion that God would not have sounded like this, he will return to the prayer with one attitude and desire. For example, he might be prepared to tell God, "Lord, I'm suspicious of this voice; help me to know how to respond." If he is inclined to believe that God actually called him, then he might well say to the voice, "Speak, for your servant is listening." In either case, Eli was a fine director because he believed enough in the reality of God's desire for intimate relationships with human beings to point Samuel in the direction of engaging God directly. Third, Eli got out of the way so that Samuel and

God could interact without interference. Finally, he asked Samuel to describe what happened when he engaged God directly, and he listened to Samuel even when the message from God was hard to hear. God's word was a word of condemnation directed at Eli and his family. Whatever other faults Eli had, at least he did not compromise in practice what he believed about God's reality.

Old and New Testaments testify to the belief that God is encountered by individuals and groups directly. Sometimes the encounter seems to be without intermediary. Adam and Eve walk with God in the garden in the cool of the day. The Lord is said to appear to Abraham and to speak directly to him. Moses and God converse directly. The risen Jesus speaks directly to Saul on the road to Damascus. At other times God seems to use a medium such as a dream, an angel, a prophet, or a natural occurrence to communicate directly with someone. With John E. Smith, I would say that all experiences of God are mediated, even the ones that seem immediate. God is pure spirit, so he does not have hands and feet and voice. If God's voice is heard, or if Adam and Eve walk with him in the garden, the experience has to be mediated through their imaginations, their sensibilities, their human perceptions. But even so, the encounter with God is



direct. That is, it is God himself who is encountered, even though mediately. Eli believed that Samuel could encounter God directly. Anyone who wants to do skilled spiritual direction must believe that God is encountered directly, and believe it in practice by encouraging directees to engage directly in the relationship. One can do very effective counseling and psychotherapy without such a practical belief. Perhaps one could do effective pastoral counseling and caring without such a practical belief, but one cannot do spiritual direction without it.

Another aspect of this practical belief must engage our attention. Old and New Testaments affirm a belief in a God who is personal, indeed, three-personal. However we define our God, e.g., "Ground of Being," "Mystery," "Infinite Act of Being," "Supreme Being," "Creator," we can never lose sight of the fact that God has revealed himself as an "I" to our "Thou." God is personal. With John Macmurray I hold that persons "are constituted by their mutual relation to one another. 'I' exist only as one element in the complex 'You and I.'" God, we Christians believe, has revealed that he is, immanently; i.e., apart from creation, he is personal, constituted by the mutual relations we name "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit." Apart from creation, in other words, God is the perfect community. Out of bountiful goodness God, the perfect community, creates a universe where creatures are constituted as persons by their relationships to God and to one another. God—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—creates human beings as persons invited into intimacy, into an "I-Thou" relationship with God. If we believe this in practice, then we will ourselves engage directly in the relationship and be willing to encourage others to do the same. What we believe in practice conditions how we act and how we minister.

## EXPERIENCE HAS RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

But now we must look at what the fact of the mediacy of the encounter with God means for spiritual direction. The fact of mediacy means that every encounter with God is, as Smith says, an encounter with something else at the same time. Hence, every encounter with God has many dimensions to it; it is physically, biologically, physiologically, neurologically, psychologically, socially, and culturally determined. Samuel's experience has all these dimensions because it is a human experience. Our young retreatant's dream also has all these dimensions. A physicist, for example, would presume, precisely as a physicist, that physical laws could be discovered that would explain his experience of

the dream. A psychologist would believe that psychological laws could be discovered to explain it. By its nature each science assumes that everything in its domain is in principle explicable if only the scientist asks the right questions and develops the appropriate tools for answering the questions. Ultimately, those dimensions of human experience one concedes as being real depend on what one believes. For example, some biologists would deny any reality to the psychological dimension of human experience because they believe that all human experience can be explained by biology, if not now, then eventually. An atheist will deny any reality to the religious dimensions of human experience, but it must be pointed out that the atheist is asserting a belief, not a provable fact. The believer avers that any human experience can have a religious dimension and can be an encounter with God.

The spiritual director has a practical belief in the religious dimension of human experience. That belief shows in the way the director goes about the work of direction. Our young retreatant's director may explore with him the experience of the dream. Together they may examine some of the psychological determinants of the way Jesus looked and of the young man's fear in the dream, for example. They certainly will inquire into the young man's feeling that the dream is important at this time in the retreat. But all this exploration will be undertaken for only one purpose, to help the young man to engage the Lord directly. The director only pursues the meaning of the dream because the directee senses that it is important at this time of the retreat. It is not pursued for its own sake or because it is interesting, but only because and insofar as its exploration will help the directee to engage more directly in his relationship with the Lord.

Reflection on the story of Samuel and Eli brings us to the conclusion that spiritual direction is distinguished from other forms of counseling and pastoral care by a practical belief that God directly encounters human beings in a personal relationship and by a passionate and professional commitment to do everything in one's power to help those who ask for spiritual direction to engage more and more directly in that relationship.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Barry, W. "The Religious Dimension of Experience." *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* 7 (Summer 1986): 22–26.
- Birmingham, M., and W. Connolly. "The Art of Spiritual Direction." *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* 8 (Spring 1987): 13–25.
- Macmurray, J. *Persons In Relation*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979.
- Smith, J. *Experience and God*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.



# Communicating Through Ritual

GERALD A. ARBUCKLE, S.M., Ph.D.

**I**n general, ritual is poorly understood. A group of clerics, when asked to define ritual, told me it was synonymous with rules about how to celebrate the sacraments. Other people thought it the equivalent of formality or something superficial, empty, phony, meaningless, unnecessarily repetitive, a boring ceremony to be suffered through from time to time. Paradoxically, however, rituals are among the most basic, frequent, and important of human actions. In fact, without ritual, we cannot remain human. We would be totally unable to communicate with one another.

As I have written in earlier articles ("Communicating Through Symbols," Spring 1987, and "Appreciating the Power of Myths," Winter 1987), culture is the response to our most fundamental need, the need for meaning and avoiding chaos (nonmeaning) in our lives. We express meaning through symbols and myths. Myths, which are symbols in narrative form, reveal to us the purpose of life and how we are to live. Through ritual action we attempt to achieve in our daily life the values and goals expressed in myths. In this article, I define ritual from the point of view of a cultural anthropologist and will explain its critical, informative function in personal and group communication.

## RITUAL SEEKS UNITY

I define ritual as the stylized symbolic use of bodily movement and gesture within a social context to express and articulate meaning. Ritual action takes place within a social context where there is possible or real conflict in social relations and is undertaken to resolve or hide it.

Daily life is filled with ambiguity; it has its inevitable tensions, potential or actual conflicts, no matter how perfect a situation may initially appear. For example, I have a very close friend, but there is always the fear that some unforeseen event will threaten to break the friendship. So I feel the need to express in action—to reaffirm—my solidarity with him from time to time in some way or other, such as in offering a gift or writing a letter to mark a birthday. The ritual strengthens my friendship, but the possibility of tension or conflict will always remain; hence, ritual must be regularly repeated if its primary goal is to be realized.

Similarly, my relationship with God is always fragile. Through sin, I could lose my friendship with him, so I pray to him, expressing my oneness with him in Christ and my desire to be always united with him. Others have the same fear, so we join together in a common act of worship or ritual. Ritual, therefore, aims to express solidarity or oneness despite tensions in relationships. Hence, in ritual the aim is to express unity while at the same time being aware that the tensions of daily life always threaten that unity. W.H. Auden articulates the emphasis on oneness in ritual in this way:

Only in rites  
can we renounce our oddities  
and be truly entired.  
("Archaeology")

## RITUAL IS TRIPARTITE PROCESS

Ritual is a dynamic process, the movement from one state or role to another, e.g., from child to adult,



outsider to insider, single to married, death to life, sin to grace, uncertain to certain identity, profane to sacred. Anthropologist Victor Turner has focused attention on the tripartite psychosocial phases commonly found in this dynamic process: separation, liminality, and reaggregation. The *separation* stage is the actual breaking away from "normal" everyday living, the hierarchical, role-structured, organized, differentiated world. The *liminal* stage is the opposite of this structured world: an experience of relating to fellow ritual participants in, at least symbolically, an undifferentiated, ecstatic oneness that is called *communitas*. Ideally, the experience of *communitas* supplies a bond that endures beyond the liminal stage and that can enrich post-ritual relationships. *Reaggregation* or *incorporation* is the phase in which participants move back into the world of status or roles.

There are two types of *communitas*, spontaneous and normative. For example, survivors from a sinking ship experience spontaneous *communitas*, where status is totally unimportant as these people face the very real threat of death together. Normative *communitas* exists when people deliberately attempt to establish a liminal situation that ideally should lead to a *communitas* experience. At Mass we are called "sisters and brothers in the Lord" to remind us that we are entering a situation or liminal stage in which nothing other than our common relationship to Christ, our brother, is important.

### LIMINAL STAGE ANTISTRUCTURAL

The liminal stage is marked by the type of symbols used and the formative role of mythology. The symbols of the liminal stage are "antistructural," that is, they connote a status for the participants that is unhierarchical and undifferentiated. The survivors in the lifeboat will not address each other's status; instinctively, they recognize the irrelevancy of titles when faced with possible death, the universal liminal leveller. In a novitiate, the novices' individual backgrounds and their status are deliberately played down and what is common to them actively emphasized, that is, that they are in the process of being initiated into a new way of life.

In the liminal stage of the ritual process, participants are reduced symbolically or realistically to the state of chaos. All their traditional supports have been at least temporarily removed. Part of the aim of stripping away the familiar is to render participants more open to the influence of creative forces, as represented by creation or regeneration myths, which have little chance consciously to affect life in the ordinary, structured, and busy routine of daily life. Paradoxically, people experience liminality when they embrace the meaninglessness of chaos for the sake of the expanded creative possibilities it can offer and for the experience of existential *communitas* or oneness with others.

Often, the root metaphor in the mythology is death/resurrection. If participants interiorize the mythology, they feel the urge when they pass out of the liminal stage to recreate the world according to their experience of the mythology. The status quo in which key societal values are compromised will no longer be tolerated.

The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises form a helpful case study. If the retreatant is to be open to inner conversion and to a creative apostolic response to this re-turning to the Lord, then the mystery of Christ's life, death, and resurrection must be relived. The aim of the silence and the complete breaking away from the distractions of one's occupation is to strip the retreatant of the familiar, so that he or she can uninterruptedly live through the paschal mystery, the root metaphor, with Christ.

Not only individuals but also entire cultures experience the tripartite ritual phases of change. In the secular cultures, the arts, such as music, painting, philosophy, and poetry, are the functional equivalent of liminality, for through the arts people explore the world beyond the predictable, the stable, and the ordinary, searching for new meanings and creative insights. Such was the case with the counterculture movement of the 1960s. In the arts, in politics, and then in religion, people sought to live in pure liminality. Out went predictable boundaries of daily living: people cultivated uncertainty over certainty, emotion over reason, immediacy of experience over asceticism, the extraordinary over the ordinary or the expected. Antistructure symbols flourished in dress, hair styles, and in behavior patterns in general. And the high priests of the three-stage ritual process were people like the Beatles, Andy Warhol, and Hermann Hesse.

### LIMINALITY YIELDS TO REAGGREGATION

The liminal state is inherently unstable; people cannot live with chaos for too long or maintain a state of being continuously "inspired." There is a yearning for order or the predictable. Hence, the third phase of ritual is the reaggregation (postliminal) process, whereby people move back into ordinary life and predictable structures.

It can happen that people become locked in the liminal stage, unable to return to ordinary living. For example, the grief process in all of its forms is a ritual. Once an individual has heard of a significant personal loss (the preliminal grief stage), his or her world of meaning is affected, and so the symptoms of grief begin, such as anger and lack of interest in one's appearance and in what is happening to others. Slowly, the grieving person becomes able to reflect on life and its purpose in light of secular or religious mythology; he or she begins to look outward, as influenced by the mythology of death/resurrection, and gradually passes into the



reaggregation stage. If, however, people refuse or are unable to move out of the liminal stage, they fall victim to chronic introversion, depression, or despair, and they become dangerous to themselves and a cause of deep concern to others. If the ritual process is to be effective, people must pass through *all* three phases.

The three stages of the ritual process are not all of the same length; in fact their length will differ according to the type of ritual being experienced. Thus, in initiation rituals, as for example in religious novitiates, even though the liminal stage is critically important, the reaggregation stage should be nonetheless as long as, if not longer than, the liminal phase. Anthropologist Mary Douglas speaks of the initiates coming out of liminality as being "charged with power, hot, dangerous, requiring insulation and a time for cooling down." They are alive with creative ideas about how the world is to be changed, yet their zeal is dangerous, for if they are not helped through a lengthy reaggregation stage to face the world of hard living and compromises, they will become cynical or will despair that any good can ever be done, or will even withdraw into a false liminality to escape the "dangers of the world." Similarly, the newly baptized adult needs a period of adjusting to the world "out there," lest his or her initial enthusiasm for the Lord's message

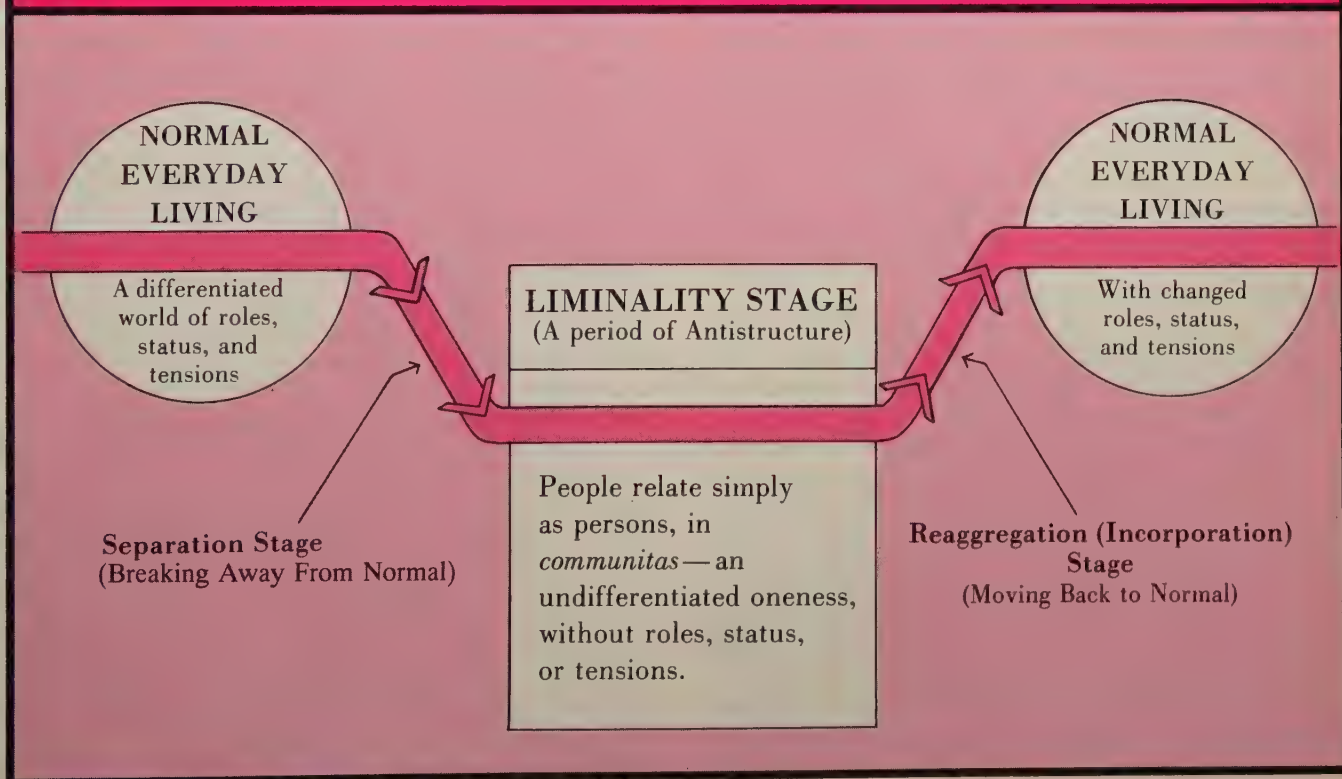
be suffocated through contact with an unwelcoming and imperfect world.

## RITUAL ROOTED IN EXPERIENCE

Ritual is fundamentally traditional, i.e., it emerges out of the the familiar world in response to our needs for security, identity, and belonging, summed up in the word *meaning*. It is rooted in our experience; otherwise, it cannot touch our needs. At the same time, rituals in response to people's need for meaning go beyond the frontiers of the visible or the rational. Mere rationality, as articulated in words, is inadequate to express the whole range of human needs and, especially, the creative experiences that occur in liminality. Symbols (and thus rituals), which speak primarily to the heart or the imagination, are expressed less by words than by actions, stillness, silences, and pauses.

As my father lay dying, words became utterly inadequate and empty. I and other members of my family spontaneously used traditional ritual gestures of touch and silence to express our grief and our union with him. We held his hands in silence, our hearts pushed to the very frontiers of existence where ultimate meanings of life and death are to be found, in Christ's death and resurrection. The liminality of those minutes gripped us.

# RITUAL VIEWED AS A PROCESS





---

## Rituals either resolve the gap between the ideal and real world or they *disguise* it by ignoring or denying that it exists

---

Last summer, I visited the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial, beside the Potomac, in Washington, D.C. On seeing what was taking place there I ceased to be a tourist and became a pilgrim. Surely, many of the fifteen million people who have descended the gently sloping path to the V-shaped granite wall were similarly transformed. I watched individuals fall on their knees on seeing the names of their deceased loved ones; others instinctively stood in silence, with heads bowed. Some reverently placed an unusual array of mementoes at the base of the wall—boots, a small glass of whiskey, flags, photos. As I had reacted when my father lay dying, so, too, these pilgrims turned to cultural ritual gestures to frame or express meaning where words were totally inadequate.

People who are insensitive to the lessons of these experiences assume that words alone can be used to articulate ritual. When the ritual appears not to grip people, they add yet more words, more and more explanations of the ritual, so that, as one complaining friend said in desperation, “the explanations are longer than the Mass itself.” Little wonder that ritual can become increasingly wearisome and irrelevant to human needs. People then move elsewhere to discover rituals that relate to their need for space, for nonverbal, ecstatic or emotional expression of oneness. The revised Holy Week liturgy was introduced into one Filipino parish church, and the priest removed all opportunities for the parishioners to express their own colorful popular religiosity. It was dull, thoroughly verbal. After the first year participation dropped off dramatically, because the people had developed their own, substitute liturgies outside on the sidestreets. The highly rational clergy had failed to grasp the imaginative complexity of ritual.

Some assume that ritual needs to be constantly changed in order “to make it relevant.” Again, there is a failure to grasp the liberating power of structure in the ritual process. Repetition frees people from worrying what to say or do; they are free to feel beyond the visible, to allow their imaginations to move beyond the surroundings, to contemplate and to listen. The actions of the pilgrims at the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial testify to this.

Secular or religious change in ritual, therefore, demands extreme caution, a willingness to listen to people, and immense patience to permit the change to be gradual in order that new meanings be allowed to emerge and be interiorized. I believe we often moved too fast in making the much-needed liturgical changes after Vatican II, and we also assumed that ritual was synonymous only with words. So, our liturgies became too wordy. If we had involved the people more in the changes, these failings would not have occurred.

### RITUALS ARE DIVERSE

Ritual is the means through which we search for, establish, and preserve or celebrate symbolic order and unity for ourselves and for society. Wherever social interaction exists or is desired, then space will be given to ritual, not that people are necessarily conscious that the ritual process is occurring. Rituals aim to make the mythic values of a society concrete and experiential; they act out these values in social relations. And rituals are as diverse and numerous as social relations. Following are some key categories.

**Secular/Religious.** A ritual is religious if it relates people to the supernatural world or to what people consider to be the *ultimate* source of meaning in their lives. It is difficult at times to distinguish a religious from an apparently secular ritual. Key national values, as articulated in America’s founding mythology or its many aberrations, may be for people the source of their ultimate meaning in life, their god. Hence, for example, the pursuit of capitalism or of individual freedom becomes a ritual in itself.

**“Model for”/“Model of.”** In “model for” rituals, the function is to impose, reaffirm, and strengthen value consensus or conformity to the status quo, as desired by leaders of a particular society. The liminality phase of ritual is barely evident or even permitted to be present, lest people discover their inner power to question the world around them. The reaggregation phase is dominant, where people are strongly reminded of the need to assent to the existing political or hierarchical power structure. Such is the case with the great Russian civil rituals, for example, on May Day.

“Model of” rituals exist where there is already a



strong value consensus within a group or nation; the consensus does not have to be imposed, but reaffirmed or strengthened and expressed through rituals, e.g., the cult rituals that surround the American flag, asserting nationally held values. So, also, the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. They took place after two decades of political turmoil and national humiliation in Vietnam and Iran. The country needed to reassure itself and express that at last a healing had taken place; once more values consensus existed. The Games offered Americans, said a writer in *Time*, the chance to relive their founding mythology: "The belief was reborn that Americans can do, well, anything" (January 7, 1985). On the religious level, the Eucharist affirms oneness of people in Christ, but as ritual it also strengthens and even causes this unity.

**Body Control/Protest-Ecstasy.** The more that rituals stress conformity to group life, the more these rituals are expressed with rigid control of dress and body movement. Such, again, is evident in the Russian civil rituals in which the emphasis is on dramatically regimented mass military parades, choirs, and dancing. Unconventional appearances or dress would be considered as a ritual protest against the social order.

Within the West itself, the dramatically different dress and music styles of the youth culture that emerged in the 1960s were rituals of protest against what was considered to be the excessive pressures to conform to the structures of the adult world. The exaggeration of the incorporation phase to the detriment of "liminal *communitas*" may produce pathological efforts on the part of some to obtain freedom from structure outside or against the law, e.g., as with members of Hell's Angels, hippie communes, or drug cultures.

Similarly, in the religious world, the Pentecostal movement was revitalized in the late 1960s outside and inside the traditional religions, partly in protest against rituals that were considered to be too impersonal, formal, excessively rational with little or no body involvement, and theologically horizontal or overly identified with this present world. People, therefore, cultivated *communitas* through ecstatic, antistructure (i.e., contrary to the usual) prayer forms; spontaneity; and enthusiastic, visible expressions of feeling a oneness in the Spirit.

**Denial/Scapegoating.** Rituals either resolve the gap between the ideal and real world or they *disguise* it by ignoring or denying that it exists. Hence, it is not uncommon for opposing groups to meet together, consciously or unconsciously refuse to acknowledge the tensions or conflicts that divide them, and effusively assert their unity, only to return to the world with divided relationships unchanged. People can produce self-congratulatory documents at conferences and refuse to recognize that the

statements conflict with reality. The conferences and the written statements are rituals of denial; painful truths will not be confronted, but people hope that the rituals in some "magical" way will remove the gap between the ideal and reality. Religious, for example, who do not wish to confront the gap between the ideal of holiness and their own lived reality, may meet in provincial and general chapters, experience an apparent *communitas*, and devotedly produce inspiring, idealistic statements about the magnificence of their religious life values while refusing to admit that they are not living, nor intend to live, these ideals.

When people are unsure of what their collective values or identity are, they may participate in witch hunts in order to discover "deviants" whom they feel are undermining consensus in society. The identification of these people and the charges they level against them are ritual ways of restating and reaffirming their collective values. The "heretics" or "deviants" become ritual scapegoats. Hence, the periodic Marxist political show trials, academic/political purges, and even at times American congressional investigations or their equivalent in other countries.

A similar type of ritual process occurs when prophetic people threaten, or question, the political/academic/religious structural status quo. The prophets are felt to pollute the accepted system of belief or customs; they are ritually "dirty," and action must be taken before others are also affected. The aroused community banish such people to the margins of society to render them harmless. The subtle or open condemnation and the banishment of the prophets ritually asserts the solidarity of the group that is threatened.

Prophets are liminal or antistructure people; that is, by their life-style, actions, and words they confront the structured world of status, wealth, power manipulation, and violence. They are powerless, in as much as they spurn the symbols of power accepted by the world they mock or reject. Yet, this same powerlessness gives them the freedom to challenge, for they depend on no one in the world they disdain. Among such people are Gandhi; Old Testament prophets; saints such as St. Benedict, St. Francis, and St. Ignatius; but above all, Christ himself. Jesus lived the antistructure life: King of Kings, he was born in a stable and had no worldly power, suffering the humiliation of a death reserved for criminals.

**Rites of Passage.** These are rituals that mark the progress of an individual between relatively fixed and stable, culturally or religiously recognized, states of rank, status, office, calling, or profession. Such rituals, for example, accompany birth, the attainment of adult status (especially in traditional cultures), preparation for religious life (novitiate), marriage, and death.



The three phases of the ritual process are not equally marked in all the rituals; for example, the element of separation is more important in mortuary ritual. Or, ideally, in marriage the phase of aggregation or the learning of the spouses to live together should be particularly stressed. In the religious novitiate, the separation stage should be short and sharp to symbolize the break required in worldly attachments, the liminal stage lengthy and isolated from the world, and the aggregation stage the longest of the three in order to aid the novices in the process of integrating their newly discovered Christian ideals with the real world of ambiguity.

### RITUAL'S FUNCTION IMPORTANT

Rituals form a particular kind of social and religious communication. They are an everyday experience crucial for the development and maintenance of social relationships, using various bodily gestures of which speech is usually the least important. Attempts to reduce ritual merely to mechanically spoken words render it banal, uninspiring, unable to articulate the mystery that the imagination yearns to feel.

Unfortunately, clerical and religious students are only rarely educated anthropologically to recognize the power and functions of ritual in human communication, how ritual can be manipulated for political purposes, and how the liminal stage can be crushed to prevent people from creatively reflecting on the status quo. It is urgent, I believe, to introduce cultural anthropology into formation programs. If this is to be done effectively, there must be a balance between theory and practice. For example, students are not just to know rationally what liminality is, they must experience it in their lives and then be helped to evaluate their reactions to the experience. One way of exposing them to the temporary stripping of structural or cultural securities is to assign them for adequate periods to a culture very different from their own. They will discover not only their own limitations but also just how much they need faith in Christ, who alone can give lasting security and a sense of belonging.

We older religious can draw on what are often painful, but intensely creative, ritual stages in our own lives, e.g., deaths of friends or our own midlife crises. Generally, we need help to recognize the positive potential in the liminality of these events, for we can sadly fail to see the lessons they hold out to us.

It is a liberating experience for people to discover how rituals can be used to deny reality. This awareness is possible *only* if people are themselves converting to the Lord. We need to acknowledge with

St. Paul the chaos of our own inner selves, our tendency to sin, and our desperate need of the Lord: "The fact is, I know of nothing good living in me—living, that is, in my unspiritual self—for though the will to do what is good is in me, the performance is not....Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:18,24–25). Armed with the converting grace of the Lord, we can confront any denial personally and corporately.

### CHANGE LINKED TO PRECEDENT

Ritual is particularly evident in times of uncertainty, anxiety, impotence, and disorder. At these moments it carries with it a fundamental message of order, continuity, and predictability. Even when ritual is concerned with change, even the most dramatic and traumatic, new events are related to preceding ones. They are absorbed into a stream of precedents so that they are understood as growing out of tradition and experience, providing the mind, but especially the heart or the imagination, with the space and the peace to reflect on key issues of life. Ritual proclaims enduring and underlying values and patterns in life, thus linking the past, present, and future, abrogating for the moment history and time.

Religious commit themselves to be at the very heart of the church's holiness. In imitation of, and in union with, Christ they are to be antistructure people: through the ritual powerlessness of their poverty and love, challenging the symbols of power, consumerism, and idolatry in the cultures they seek to evangelize, witnessing to the joy that will reach its perfection in the world to come.

When Moses approached the burning bush, Yahweh told him, "Take off your shoes, for the place on which you stand is holy ground" (Ex 3:5). Surely, similar caution and reverence is needed by all who wish to fathom the meaning and purpose of rituals. There is no room here for the brash amateur.

### RECOMMENDED READING

- Arbuckle, G. *Strategies for Growth in Religious Life*. New York: Alba House, 1986.
- Collins, P. *More Than Meets the Eye: Ritual and Parish Liturgy*. New York: Paulist Press, 1983.
- Lane, C. *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society—the Soviet Case*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Martin, B. *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981.
- Turner, V. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.



# The Risky Confrontation of Friends

LEONARD SCHWARTZBURD, Ph.D.

**F**or purposes of this article, "friends" can include family members, community members, co-workers, neighbors, companions, or for that matter, anyone we love. Aristotle, in *Nichomachean Ethics*, refers to the proverb "What friends have is common property" in order to demonstrate the truth of his proposition "friendship depends on community." Since "community" implies responsibility, Aristotle would, by inference, appear to agree that we are our siblings' keepers.

Aristotle defined three kinds of friendship. For our present purposes we leave behind those aspects of friendship based on the instrumental values in which we ask only what we can get from a friend. Aristotle suggests that in such friendships people "were lovers not of each other but of profit."

It appears that for Aristotle the element of love is central to a truer form of friendship:

Now since friendship depends more on loving, and it is those who love their friends that are praised, loving seems to be the characteristic virtue of friends, so it is only those in whom this is found in due measure that are lasting friends, and only their friendship that endures.... For (1) we define a friend as one who wishes and does what is good, or seems so, for the sake of his [or her] friend....

Robert Bellah, in *Habits of the Heart*, calls attention to the moral component of friendship in Aristotle's work as

the indispensable basis of a good society. For it is one of the main duties of friends to help one another to be better persons.... Traditionally, the opposite of a friend

is a flatterer, who tells one what one wants to hear and fails to tell the truth.

## CONFRONTER FEARS LOSS

We are led to raise the question, "What do we owe to a friend when their behavior or 'particular state of being' raises within us feelings of grave concern?" This question suggests that the bond to our friends transcends self-interest. As most people recognize, there is a risk of personal loss in being the bearer of a distasteful or hurtful message, regardless of or perhaps particularly in light of its truth. The child's tale "The Emperor's New Clothes" and the ancient practice of slaying the messenger who brings bad tidings bespeak the widely grasped danger in confronting someone with facts that they do not want to hear.

When I was in high school I faced such a dilemma, fortunately of comic proportions, which illustrates the problem. I had made a new friend whom I valued highly. One day he came to school with breath that smelled awful. I was embarrassed for him and felt protective of him. I bought some gum for the sole purpose of giving him a piece, but his father was a dentist, and much to my dismay, my friend rejected it as being bad for his teeth. I was perplexed and disquieted but rather than confront him with the truth I chose to remain silent, to bear the discomfort, and to leave him prey to the minor social consequences of his transient oral condition.

It is instructive to ask why I did not simply say something of a direct and gentle nature. Part of the



---

## A person engaging in a self-damaging pattern is a person in pain, and the ability to relate to that pain in a caring way is crucial to the outcome

---

answer is found in the difficulty of finding a kind and inoffensive way of putting such things. The greater part of the truth lay in my fearing the loss of my friend if an action of mine were to have a direct causal connection to his being embarrassed.

### CONFRONTATION INVOLVES RISK

Thus the answer to the question as to what we owe our friends can be complicated by questions of what we risk. But our questions of risk must be illuminated by an examination of what more we can lose if a person whom we value continues on a path that raises serious concerns within us.

Perhaps a more recent example will shed light. A dear friend who is alcoholic but had been sober started to drink again. As is so often the case his drinking was done secretly. Through various subtle signs I came to suspect his drinking but could not be sure. Thus in addition to risking his wrath I had the risk of feeling foolish if I was wrong.

There is a third sort of risk in confronting a friend. It is related to the distinct possibility that our intervention will do no good or will even cause harm.

In light of all the risks involved, we are certainly warranted in entertaining the notion of just minding our own business, as most people generally seem to do. What then could justify a confrontation?

### LOVE LEGITIMATES CONFRONTATION

In attempting to answer that question, it is instructive to consider the deeper nature of the bond of friendship. As Aristotle and subsequent writers have understood, this bond plainly involves the issue of love, considered here as being those feelings attached to an unqualified valuing of another, in

the face of seeing them as they really are. Obviously, our religious values hold out the ideal of loving all people, but in the reality of everyday life, most of us fall short of the ideal, and we must save our major investments only for those we know and love, our friends, and those to whom we minister.

To truly love others is to value them for their own sake, for what they are in and of themselves. When a friend is involved in a situation that raises deep concern, we feel that what the person is, which we love, is in danger of serious damage. It is my belief that in our connectedness to one another we must answer Cain's question in the affirmative. That is, we *are* our brother's keepers. This, in the case of friends, implies responsibility to and not authority over.

If we are persuaded that we do have a responsibility in a particular case, how can we best proceed? There are a number of issues to consider carefully before taking confrontational action.

**Examine Motives.** First, we must carefully consider our motives. Are we truly seeking what is in the other person's best interest? There are dangers here. Often, in an attempt to bolster our own self-esteem we might try to place ourselves in a helper role. We may have anger toward the other person and may in fact be using the situation as a pretext to discomfort them. We should ask ourselves whether we can tolerate it if our attempts to help are to no avail or are even rebuffed in anger.

**Consider Potential Harm.** Of great importance is the consideration of potential harm. The single most important question to ask is, "How fragile is the friend?" If the person's self-concept is very weak and the confrontation would serve to shake it further, then the risk of doing so must be carefully weighed against the risk of the friend continuing the self-destructive behavior pattern unabated. If the person's thought processes are disturbed, or have in some way apparently lost contact with reality, then great caution must be used in approaching him or her with potentially disturbing feedback.

Another type of person for whom confrontation may result in negative consequences might be called the oppositional personality. These are persons who when challenged tend to dig in their heels and may even increase the problematic behavior out of a need to protect their self-esteem.

**Group Can Intervene.** Intervention by a group, which should consider the cautions and other considerations discussed above, can be a very powerful technique to induce change. Groups can be composed of various combinations of people. Community members and superiors are a natural resource for an intervention. Family members are sometimes very effective. I have seen an aging alcoholic man deeply moved by the appeal of his adolescent



grandchildren for him to regain his health and personality. Friends and employers are often effective.

## SEEK CONSULTATION FIRST

If we have found both justification and courage to intervene with a friend, then it is a very good idea to consult with another trusted and respected friend, or even better, a professional person, such as a spiritual advisor, counselor, or psychotherapist, before acting. This provides a valuable opportunity to confirm the validity of our motives and to verify our perspective on the potential helpfulness and harm in our contemplated act.

Of major importance is to ask oneself how caring one is actually feeling toward one's friend and how capable one is of communicating that caring. A person engaging in a self-damaging pattern is a person in pain, and the ability to relate to that pain in a caring way is crucial to the outcome. It is perhaps the most important factor in whether or not the confrontation will be experienced as fundamentally supportive or as an attack. This issue should also be examined with your consultant.

**Communicate Genuine Caring.** When a person is confronted, they will naturally feel defensive. It is very important, first, to minimize the erection of defensive barriers and, second, to be able to get around those barriers that have been put up. As mentioned above, the communication of genuine caring is a preeminent condition in minimizing defensive reactions. It is helpful not to take the friend by surprise. If the person is somewhat prepared, he or she is able to assume a more open stance. Say something like, "Joe, my concern for you leads me to ask your permission to say something of a rather challenging nature to you." It is important to phrase your remarks in a way that does not put your friend in a corner. For example, you could say something like, "I certainly could be wrong" or "This is only my perception and you are free to use it or not."

I have found it helpful to ask the person to agree in advance not to respond for a couple of days. If you ask them to try to regard your approach to them as a loving gift and to consider for a few days whether or not they want to keep it, there is no need to respond impulsively in a defensive way. It

## Barriers Preventing Helpful Confrontation





is here that your own need to help can get in the way. If you are unable to give the gift freely, i.e., for you to feel at peace if it is not accepted, it becomes a demand and is more likely to be rejected.

**Address Person's Behavior.** It is very important to address a person's behavior rather than his or her character. When we criticize a person's character we leave them very little room to continue feeling a sense of integrity. In circumstances where people experience an attack on their basic way of being as a person, they must retreat behind their defenses, and no useful purpose is served. Indeed, it is often counterproductive. People can accept that at times their behavior is wrong, harmful, or objectionable. They cannot, usually, accept that these negative qualities apply to the essential or basic aspects of their personhood.

**Refer to Specific Incidents.** Speak of a pattern of behavior. Be prepared to give a number of specific examples to illustrate the kind of behavior that causes concern. For example, "The Sunday before last I felt very concerned for you when you drank so much that you couldn't speak coherently, then embarrassed for you when our guests obviously didn't know what to say." Another health-threatening behavior might be related to the Type A behavior pattern (see "Preventing Heart Attacks," HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Winter 1985). One might say something like, "Yesterday when you became so angry over the newspaper not being delivered, I feared that you might have a heart attack. What a waste it would be to lose you over something so trivial."

Sometimes it is the annoying behavior of another that must be addressed. This is the most difficult of all situations, in some respects, as our concerns for our own comfort are what most clearly motivate us. It requires an act of self-discipline to put the offending person's own situation into perspective. In such a case an appropriate intervention might be, "Alice, sometimes you do not take responsibility for yourself, and it bothers me. For example, when you forget to clean up the bathroom after you use it I get upset because I have to do your work for you. It bothers me to be upset with you because those feelings make it hard for me to enjoy your many good qualities. I am also concerned that you are causing alienation to grow between yourself and others by what appears to be a lack of consideration for others. I wanted to tell you about this because I know you do care about others and would want to do something about the situation if you became aware of it."

**Avoid Evoking Guilt.** As in the examples above, communicate and emphasize your caring as part of your expressed concerns. Be explicit in your expression and relate your caring to your interven-

tion. The emphasis on caring is vital to enabling your impaired friend to hear and accept what is being said. Try to avoid evoking guilt feelings. Guilt will tend to stimulate the mobilization of defenses. Stress the positive aspects of your friend and cast the problematic behavior in terms that show it to interfere with and diminish his or her positive characteristics. Assume positive motivation on your friend's part.

**Seek Professional Assistance.** There are professionals who have the training and experience to help with the difficult task of intervening with a friend bent on self-harm. Timely intervention is essential. In the area of alcohol and drug abuse, such help can often be found at the community-based treatment programs that are often located in local hospitals. If the problem is of another sort, consult a qualified psychologist, licensed clinical social worker, nurse clinical specialist, psychiatrist, spiritual director, or other counseling professional with experience in this area.

**Suggest Resources for Help.** Be prepared to offer your friend suggestions for possible help. The person who has been confronted may feel at a loss and may need the structure inherent in knowing where and how to get help. This can be a valuable opportunity to steer your friend toward appropriate assistance. Use the consultation part of your process to get specific ideas of the best resources for help. Get the names and phone numbers of two or three programs or appropriate practitioners and have them ready to offer.

## CONFRONTER MAY FACE REJECTION

True friendship involves risks. You may incur the temporary anger and rejection of a friend. If you proceed with care, however, both your friend and you stand to gain an enriched relationship. We cannot ignore the possibility that someone may not forgive us. I recall an old gentleman whom I confronted when I worked in an inpatient alcoholism unit. I told him that he wasn't serious and that he would never remain sober. He was very angry with me. I remember him coming to aftercare meetings with a glint in his eye as he flaunted his sobriety at me as if to say, "See, you young whippersnapper, you don't know so much." I learned that five years later he died in a fall from a motor scooter, but he had remained defiantly sober for the rest of his life. There will be times when to be a friend, we must say some things that are painful and unwelcome. We can only seek within ourselves, perhaps through prayer, for the strength to bear the rejection that can follow, and hope it will not last. To do this we must look within to whatever is there. We are thus reminded that to be a friend to others we must be willing to confront ourselves first.



# What I Learned as a General Councillor in Rome

MAUREEN P. FLOOD, S.S.S.

**I** was elected to our general council in 1981, as first assistant to the superior general, for a term of six years. After five years I resigned. Many things about my five years in Rome were wonderful. I loved the city, its beauty and age, its history, its art, and the excitement of its streets. I met wonderful people and made close, dear friends; I worked hard, prayed, cried, laughed, and saw places many people would work half a lifetime to see. I don't regret my years in Rome. I do regret some aspects of them, and in this article I want to explore some of the difficulties facing people sent into such a situation.

## ELECTION ENGENDERS AMBIVALENCE

The experience of election is confusing. Members gather from all over the world—from different nations, languages, cultures, and backgrounds. Even if the chapter has a good facilitator, there is no way that the members can come to know each other very well. Our 1981 chapter lasted for five weeks. A process of discernment was undertaken for a few days, about midway through, and there was opportunity for open discussion and for those whose names were coming up to say how they saw the situation. I found the whole experience very demanding emotionally and psychologically. I hardly knew any of the people, and they did not really know me. They saw that I was reasonably intelligent and articulate, that I had some good ideas, and that I was capable of working with others. I knew they were considering me for first assistant. I had no way of knowing what each one would do when it came to voting (strange things happen in

elections!). I felt very uneasy about the prospect of having to leave my own country, Australia, and all I loved in it, even while part of me believed that work on an international level, in Rome, could be interesting and worthwhile. I felt suspended and uncertain.

There is a degree of chance in this sort of election, the Holy Spirit notwithstanding, and as the candidates are not campaigning for themselves, but rather, the contrary, there is a high degree of ambivalence in each person being considered. It is not a comfortable position and has tension built into it. Whatever altruistic motives of self-giving and service there may be, there is acute awareness of all that will be left behind and of the great uprooting that will be necessary. This is not a job for which one is prepared in advance. No conscious training has been undertaken. Often the job description is vague. The situation is almost exactly the opposite from the way we now prepare people for specific types of ministry.

When, finally, I was elected, I felt I had allowed a terrible mistake to happen—a feeling I have since learned is common among the newly elected—but it was a bit late and futile to be indulging in that kind of thinking. I returned to Australia, finished up my work, packed, had a bit of a holiday, said a lot of good-byes, and headed back for Rome, feeling miserable. I was uprooting myself from a community I loved and from family, friends, work, country, and language, for I knew not what. How much thought had I ever given to what a general councillor actually does? The list of councillors came around after each general chapter and tended to be



---

## Perhaps the hardest thing for many councillors is the loss of their professional ministry and responsibility

---

quickly forgotten. I was now on that list! What was I getting myself into? Well, I told myself, there was service to be done, and it was a challenge. I still felt miserable.

I arrived in Rome feeling ignorant about what faced me, uncertain about my role, and nervous about how I'd cope with new languages. The following day I survived a three-hour council meeting in French!

### GROWTH IN RELATIONSHIPS IMPORTANT

One of the most common problems for a general councillor is that there is no clear job description of what she or he has been elected *for*. There are some teams who mark out areas of work, but there is still a lot of ambiguity. There is the general expectation that the team will work together for the good of the congregation with respect to administration and animation. Some teams emphasize animation over administration, and vice versa. Whatever the orientation, nothing much will happen unless a deliberate program is worked out to provide how these people, complete strangers to each other, are going to both work together and live and grow together in their relationships with each other. Without this, the work will be not only more difficult but also rather sterile, in the realm of human development. Because of the lack of external ministry, these people see a great deal of each other. Their first and most vital task lies in the realm of their own interpersonal relationships.

It is safe enough to presume that each new coun-

cillor feels as much at sea as any other, as uprooted, lonely, and isolated as the next one. And yet, teams of people in this condition often set to work as if their personal difficulties did not exist. The team is usually made up of people of different languages, with no common cultural background or previous shared experience. Our complete team had six members, from five different nationalities. It was presumed that we would all speak French, even though at that stage my French was rudimentary. While struggling with language, it is hard to acquire a personal understanding of each other, let alone achieve any kind of intimacy.

One male religious told me that even after years on a council, the hardest thing for him was that there was always a certain formality in his relations with the other team members. A group of strangers and foreigners, suddenly thrown very closely together, will never pass beyond that formality unless significant time is set aside for the group to look at itself and to work on what is happening among the members (which is what we advise for every other religious community), calling on professional help when necessary, both for the team as a whole and for individual members. The general team, at the beginning, is made up of uprooted human beings who are under pressure much more severe than the members of their congregation would likely suspect.

### LOSS OF PROFESSIONAL MINISTRY

Perhaps the hardest thing for many councillors is the loss of their professional ministry and responsibility. Many of those elected are highly trained, professional people, who have held key positions in their home countries. In many cases, all that ministry and professional work come to an end on the day of election, or very soon afterwards, and there is a sudden drop in direct responsibility. The superior general has both the privilege and the pain of being where the buck stops. The other members usually find that their new responsibilities are much less than those they left behind, and while this can be a relief for a while, there is also an enormous sense of diminishment, often followed by disorientation and depression.

If this is handled well, it can become an invaluable learning situation, a "desert experience," where new self-knowledge is born and new freedom found. But guides are needed in the desert, especially for people who are normally highly self-actualized and who now find themselves lost in what can be a very dry desert indeed. Even the usual support of shared prayer is not available when one's own language is not used.

I can't overemphasize the value of having the assistance of experienced religious counsellors, particularly at the beginning and at the end of a term in a generalate house in Rome. Members of general



teams are usually in midlife, which is difficult enough at the best of times and becomes very much more complicated when the familiar support system is some thousands of miles away.

## **FRIENDSHIP PROVIDES SUPPORT**

Next to professional guidance, at least at the most sensitive times, the single most important source of support comes from having a circle of friends, some of whom may become intimate friends. This sometimes occurs within the council itself, but not always. There is a remarkable network of people to be tuned into in Rome, and the most enriching aspect of life there is the friendships that are formed.

I gladly accepted the invitation of a superior general who, acting out of his own felt need, wanted to form a small faith-sharing group. There were four of us, two women and two men, and we met regularly for personal sharing. We listened to each other about our particular situations and struggles; we shared faith, prayer, fun, healing, and growth; we grew into intimate friends. There was also a wider circle of people, some of whom became very close and dear friends, who often challenged, encouraged, and enriched me beyond what many of them would realize. I know that without them my life in Rome would have been impossible at times.

Forming friendships takes time, and "let's go out for pizza" was often the signal that time was to be taken. Yet many councillors and superiors general alike can be caught in the tension between going out with friends and staying at home to get another few letters written, to prepare the next day's meeting, or simply because of the expectation that one will, after all, be at home. In some groups, spending time with friends seems to cause a conflict of interests and is thereby discouraged, especially when having time off and out has not been built into the program from the beginning; not considered important in the overall planning of structures, personal time has to be seized when the opportunity arises.

## **OUTSIDE MINISTRY NEEDED**

Many men and women religious in Rome find a variety of interests to balance the confining nature of their work as internal administrators. This is particularly important for those whose jobs keep them in Rome most of the time either because of the nature of their special tasks or because of the system adopted by their congregations. Some follow study courses, others become, almost willy-nilly, expert tour guides. Most of us got trips to and from the airport down to a fine art and developed great sensitivity to the needs of travellers, thus contributing to the apostolate of tourism in no small measure, to the relief of many a weary pilgrim.

Clerics have possibilities of some priestly min-

istry, at least from time to time. Foreign women religious have a much harder time finding local ministry among Italian people. It sometimes seemed to me that I did not really live in Italy. We had no Italians in our house and never spoke Italian in the community. For the most part I met only other foreign religious like myself, not local people, rather as if I was in an embassy world. I felt I lived in a kind of religious ghetto, floating somewhere above the State of Italy. I had interesting part-time work at Vatican Radio, but even there, where I worked in the English section, I met only other English-speaking people, not Italians.

In my first two years in Rome I did the round of meetings and talks on religious life, a circuit one can stay on forever but that becomes sterile after a time if there is no outlet in ministry to real need. During my last few years I continued to go to meetings that were especially oriented to world issues. Among these *Servizio di Documentazione e Studi* (Service of Documentation and Studies) was the most important for me. This and the International Union of Superiors General were sources not only of information from all over the world but also of inspiration.

A field of apostolic work has opened in Rome for anyone who wants to be involved in refugee work. Dozens of religious are volunteers and more than a hundred refugees are now housed in generalates in Rome, though many communities still have structures that keep their doors closed to such need.

Lack of ministry is not such a big problem for those who travel extensively. They face their own sort of difficulties when they return to Rome, between trips, and are confronted with mountains of paper and endless hours of meetings, before setting off on their next journey. Their situation is rushed, tense, and tiring, and many seem to be relieved to be on their way again. The question arises as to where and when the incessant traveller lives his or her personal life—a hard question to face. If they are in Rome for a longer period than usual, the problem can become one of not having enough to do. This is far from uncommon and is, perhaps, more hazardous for those others who stay in Rome most of the time and do not involve themselves beyond the small world of the general house. Boredom added to loneliness and isolation is a dangerous mix, and the consequent turning in on oneself can lead to breakdown, in its many and various forms.

Others keep frustration at bay by overwork, by making work their life. Here also burnout and breakdown can occur. Even though there is now more openness about this kind of suffering, a great deal of hidden pain continues.

## **BUREAUCRACY SOMETIMES FRUSTRATING**

There is another difficulty among those of this particular group who live in an environment not



found elsewhere and whose unique struggle has not been adequately documented. Feeling, daily, the weight of the Vatican, its bureaucracy and apparent insensitivity, especially to women's issues, takes its toll. Both men and women religious suffer in their relationships with the Vatican, which often takes a hard-line approach to requests for changes in religious life-style, forms of apostolate, and government. On these fields, battles are fought daily. The atmosphere is one of strict control, and this is the air a religious breathes in Rome. It can become stifling. For some, the direct confrontation with such impersonal power can lead to feelings of confusion, anger, frustration, and depression and may lead into a very long journey to rediscover the true face of Christ in the human face of the church.

Women suffer in particular ways. The very high visibility of male structures is overwhelming and is felt in the very architecture and dimensions of Vatican buildings. It is felt in the way any Vatican liturgy is conducted. It is felt most deeply by women who have dealt with Vatican officialdom and have come face to face with a stance that still sees women as a threat that must be dominated, never as equals. These women know how wearing and oppressive the process becomes, how discouraging and disillusioning. There is tremendous energy needed to keep faith, to remain loving and to grow in love, to channel anger productively. Even with this effort, a sense of alienation from the church's central administration can grow.

The great majority of superiors general and councillors see their designated term through to the end and, usually, count the years as valuable and enriching in the long run. But a very high price is paid on the way. Not all survive well; some simply survive. Most need help, personal and communal, if they are going to grow and flourish during their term in Rome.

## REENTRY PROMPTS REASSESSMENT

Rome is a place of passage, and eventually, assignments there come to an end. Those in their last year have already seen a good number of their friends leave and tend not to get to know newcomers all that well. A new sense of aloneness begins as attention is focused on "What am I going to do next year?" Many take an interim time for study, renewal, or rest before assuming new roles. The reentry is never easy. Some, whose professional positions have long since been filled by others, have to start looking for entirely new jobs, sometimes in a whole new area. A lot of ground is lost, these days, if people are out of a field for six years.

Those who want to return to a formerly held position or something similar need to foresee that and

to make special arrangements to return home regularly, to keep in touch and up-to-date in their professional work. This is hard to achieve if the whole team is required to make Rome its permanent base; consequently, some are now asking questions about the necessity of always having to reside in Rome. The whole project is cumbersome, expensive, and demanding of personnel whom provinces can now ill afford to let go.

Some congregations already have "roving" councillors, who live in their own regions, moving around in them and going to Rome a few times a year for meetings. A few others have already moved, or are in the process of moving, out of Rome altogether, sometimes for reasons of economy, sometimes because they have concluded that they can function more effectively away from "la bella Roma." The latter reason may involve questions of language and culture or the desire to have the central administration closer to where other members of the congregation are actually living and working, rather than close to the Vatican for the convenience of being more easily able to negotiate problems of canon law.

Many generalates will choose to remain in Rome for a long time yet. It is a crossroads of the world, and some international orders see it as "neutral" territory for their members. Some very great women and men live and work in Rome and are using their impressive gifts and talents across international barriers to make the church a sign of hope for a better world.

For those who stay and for those who move out of Rome, there is the same question of how to function well, in a way that is creative and productive not only for congregations as a whole but also for individual members of councils. Moving out of Rome does not automatically improve the team's own dynamics. Wherever the team is going to live, it will be made up of people who come from home situations where forms of local government have changed enormously and who will find themselves confronted, on the generalate level, with heavy machinery, which itself needs overhauling.

At the end of five years as a general councillor, I resigned. The years, for all their pain, had been fruitful, but the price I was paying, in terms of who I really am, became too high. I took my last early morning walk to St. Peter's and saw, as often before, beyond the square. I saw the few homeless men who sleep just outside its perimeter. No one is allowed to sleep in the galleries beneath the sweeping colonnades. The cruising policemen make sure that law is observed. The image is a strong one for me: a stark contrast between human need and the law. The carefully guarded square lies undisturbed in the early morning light.



# When Charity Goes Awry

*Eric Griffin-Shelley, Ph.D., and Kenneth R. Sandler, M.D.*

**R**ecent experiences with both a priest and a sister have brought the issue of the role of charity into focus for us. From our perspectives as psychologist and psychotherapist, who specialize in treating priests and vowed religious, it seems to us that those who are committed to a religious lifestyle frequently suffer from either too little or too much charity.

## TOO MUCH CHARITY OBSTRUCTS

The priest in question had been involved in sexual affairs and one particular relationship for about eighteen years. He drank too much. His promiscuous behavior was often associated with drinking episodes. He became progressively more guilt-ridden and disturbed until he finally suffered a psychotic delusion, i.e., he thought "people" were "after" him. Near his collapse, he deposited a "pay off" in a phone booth to get these "people" to leave him alone. He then underwent long-term psychiatric hospitalization. The man had never imagined this fate, even in his wildest dreams. No one had ever suggested that it might happen to him. He was so traumatized that he began to have suicidal thoughts.

Over the years, he had become increasingly depressed and anxious as his attempts at self-control had failed. He had hoped and prayed for the strength to resist "temptation," but help never seemed to come at the crucial moment. He was afraid and embarrassed to tell anyone of his "failures," especially his bishop or the chancellor of the diocese and his brother priests. He had existed by himself

in a lonely, isolated "hell" until he finally slipped out of reality. When we first met him, he was so anxious that he could not sit still for more than a few moments. He was so depressed that he felt hopeless and had no energy and no motivation. He was in complete despair. He had lost all self-confidence and could not even socialize with the other priests on the unit. Fortunately, he responded to therapy, and in three months he was home.

As we began to plan his discharge, we spoke with his bishop about his ministerial assignment. We were surprised to find out that the bishop knew of both his drinking and sexual transgressions. He even knew the name of the woman involved in the long-standing affair. Later in the planning process, we were, again, taken aback to discover that the priests in his diocese all knew of his womanizing and drinking problems. We wanted this priest to return to his previous assignment in order to build his self-confidence. We reasoned that a return to his parish would give him the message that despite his problems with impulse control, he still had all of the strengths and abilities that he had exhibited before the condition became uncontrollable. The bishop and his priest consultants, however, discouraged his return to his former parish. They concluded that his problems were due to the "stress" of the assignment.

An occasional abuse of alcohol or sexual "fling" in anyone may be related to stress and the need to let off steam, but long-term psychiatric problems like the ones described above are not. We suspect that the priests and bishop in question turned their heads in the name of being "charitable" to this priest



when he was in trouble. As most of us do, they probably hoped that he would use "willpower" to stop. Unfortunately, when an illness such as this has progressed to this stage, using one's own inner controls is impossible. As the illness develops, the person's self-control mechanisms have been challenged repeatedly and have failed so often that the person no longer believes in himself. Outsiders say to themselves, "Well, I can stop at two drinks" or "I resist temptations, why can't he?" They conclude that the person "doesn't want to stop" rather than acknowledge that he has a serious, progressive mental illness. In other words, their charity went too far in his case and actually promoted suffering rather than healing.

## TOO LITTLE CHARITY IGNORES

A sister that we worked with recently celebrated her first year of sobriety. Her story illustrates our notion of too little charity. She had a history similar to that of the priest described above in that she drank to excess and was sexually active. She came to our attention when we were contacted by her religious superior after she had made suicidal threats. Actually, she had been drinking and felt so helpless, hopeless, and worthless that she did not want to go on with her life. She was probably too intoxicated that particular night to actually have been able to kill herself, but she was so out of control that other sisters noticed her unusual behavior.

This nun had been drinking secretly on weekends for years. She had been involved in an exclusive friendship that others noticed but failed to bring to anyone's attention. This was probably a "charitable" response in their minds. She did end the destructive relationship on her own, but alcohol was another story. She grew up in an alcoholic home and was sexually abused by her father. She had learned both to survive and to turn off her feelings at an early age. She was a dedicated, hard-working religious who won the admiration of her peers and superiors. No one knew that she drank. No one knew of her sexual feelings or behaviors.

She kept her community at a distance. Because of her irritability and good record, no one challenged her or expressed concern about her isolation, temper, or impulsivity. Finally, she entered treatment and committed herself to abstaining from alcohol. Her recovery, however, was not without its stumbling blocks. Within months, she was drinking again and had become involved with a layman in her parish. She could not ask for help. When her deceptions collapsed, she refused to return for inpatient care.

Her local superior and we were at an impasse. Since her refusal to cooperate was both extreme and irrational, we suggested extending our charitable efforts to the limit and telling her that she could no longer represent her community in her

normal role as parish minister. Her regional superior found this a very difficult step to take. Her idea of charity was not what we had in mind. She was tempted to hold back and not go far enough. She agreed to try our suggestion, however. The sister in question was furious, but her defenses collapsed and she finally surrendered to what, so far, has been a successful treatment.

The two examples are instances where charity has either gone too far, or might not have gone far enough. Noncharitable responses reflect a lack of concern, compassion, or understanding. We can also be guilty of being too charitable, i.e., too concerned, compassionate, or understanding.

## CHARITY MEANS LOVE

Charity is, of course, love. And love is what God and the church are all about. So, how is it that we could have too much or too little love? Can charity be overdone or underdeveloped? Obviously, it can.

God has called us to be loving or charitable in many, many ways. One of our favorites is the often-quoted verse in a letter from St. Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor 13:13). In fact, this well-known verse has been translated both as "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" and as "There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope, and charity; and the greatest of these is charity." Charity is a virtue and a charism of many religious communities. Love is a basic, essential human emotion all of us feel and need. But how are we to express this love, to act in charity? In the same letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul elaborates:

"Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly ever notice when other do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone you will be loyal to them no matter what the cost. You will always believe in them, always expect the best of them, and always stand your ground in defending them.

1 Cor. 13:4-7

As with all good words of advice or direction, these can be distorted in various ways that produce the opposite of what is intended. Always coming to a person's defense can be detrimental when denial is involved on the part of the defender. Knowing when to "stand our ground" or when to "be loyal to him no matter what" are judgment calls and, as such, are subject to human error and distortion. Some examples of common distortions follow.

## MISDIRECTED CHARITY

Caring, compassion, and love are essential qualities of Christian communities. All religious have



# The Possibility of Excessive Charity



*Can we really  
love people  
too much?*

*Only if you care  
about yourself  
more than  
you care about  
them.*

dedicated their lives to Christ and strive to be more like him every day. Christ was able to balance both forgiveness and confrontation in a unique expression of God's love for us all. As imperfect human beings, being able to love so much as to be able to confront an obvious problem is trying. At times, we understand too readily and forgive without being really honest with the person who is having problems. We "don't want to get involved" or we fear being wrong or too judgmental. Unfortunately, we are caring more for ourselves when we do this than we are caring for the other.

In the chemical dependency field, writers have coined terms like "codependency" and "enabling" to describe the nature of this avoidant relationship. The idea is simple. By making excuses for the person or shifting our responsibility to deal with the issue back to them, we "enable" the problem to continue and, in fact, it will inevitably get worse. We are in some way dependent on maintaining the status quo with the relationship and fear rocking the boat. At times, this may be a realistic fear, but often, we are as entangled in our own system of defenses as the person with whom we are afraid of being direct. Five of these defenses are denial, rationalization, intellectualization, minimization, and projection.

**Denial.** Denial is the most basic and primitive form of defense. For persons with the problem, it is simple, i.e., they are unable to acknowledge that the

difficulty exists. Superiors and fellow religious can fall into a parallel trap. Obviously, for the priest described above, most people knew of his problem, yet no one ever suggested to him that he seek help, such as attending an Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) meeting, consulting a psychologist, or getting spiritual direction. He said that "one time" in confession a priest had suggested that he "try A.A." But he was blind to the issue. Many times, his confessors may also have been avoiding the problem. This is, essentially, denial. The problem is "not a problem." It is not recognized for what it is.

**Rationalization.** A somewhat more sophisticated form of defense is to acknowledge the problem but to rationalize it away. This means to call it something else, like calling alcoholism a problem of "stress" or referring to problems with sexuality as "sinfulness." Rationalizing is a way of making excuses for a person. It is an attempt to find a reason or an explanation for an irrational action or belief. Many people are uncomfortable with mental or emotional problems and prefer to find another explanation for them rather than "label" them psychiatric or psychological. This attitude can be rationalized to one's self as more Christian or charitable.

**Intellectualization.** A step beyond rationalizing is intellectualizing. Rather than simply providing an excuse or a rationale for behavior, intellectualizing



---

## Is it expecting too much charity to ask that—in relation to alcoholism and mental illness—this “disease concept” be understood?

---

develops an entire argument or justification for the problem. Instead of ignoring or passing off the problem, the intellectualizers weave an elaborate web designed to convince themselves and others that the problem is actually proper, believable, and appropriate. In the face of this complex and ponderous defense, most people just back down and look at other things. Sometimes, those of us who have too much charity need to intellectualize to cope with our own feelings of guilt at not confronting the reality of the problem.

**Minimization.** A variation on intellectual and rational defenses is a defense called minimization. We are all familiar with the person who makes a mountain out of a molehill. This type of person is often labelled as hysterical or prone to exaggeration. The minimizer does the opposite. He or she takes a growing problem and makes it into a minor aberration or an “accident.” A typical comment from a person who is minimizing is something like, “It will never happen again” or “I made a mistake, sorry.” They disarm us with their admission of guilt and make us look like ogres or perfectionists if we persist in criticizing them or making a point of the problem.

**Projection.** Another common defense is called projection. In this interaction, the person at fault turns

the blame onto someone or something else. For example, an angry outburst may be attributed to the weather or to “your constant criticism.” Even when confronted with a collection of examples of the problem in question, the person may persist in blaming other people or other circumstances. Some people are so egocentric or narcissistic that they cannot tolerate even the smallest suggestion that they are imperfect or have shortcomings. Despite extensive religious training and indoctrination in humility and selflessness, they have large egos and need constant affirmation. Since the world and all of us are full of imperfections, it is easy to shift the responsibility by projecting the blame elsewhere.

All of the defenses outlined above can be found both in people with problems and in those who live with them or are responsible for them in some way. When used in the name of charity, these various styles of defense—denial, rationalization, intellectualization, minimization, and projection—interfere with our being able to face the truth. Unfortunately, this misguided sense of loving can actually prolong the problem, the suffering, and the length of treatment needed for recovery. In fact, this delay can place the person with an emotional or psychological problem at risk. Suicide or even “accidents” can be the ultimate “solution,” “escape,” or “release valve” for someone who is in pain and feels helpless and hopeless about change.

### LACK OF COMPASSION

The opposite of too much caring is, of course, too little love. Sometimes priests, brothers, or sisters come to us after suffering from a great deal of misunderstanding and intolerance of their mental or emotional problems. We believe that this lack of compassion is largely a reflection of an absence of education about emotional or psychiatric problems. Not so long ago, one of us was attending Sunday Mass when his parish priest announced to the congregation that they were not in need of psychiatric or psychological help, simply because they were Catholic. This example of simplistic thinking unfortunately exists among vowed religious, despite efforts to change attitudes and expand education. The integration of psychological and spiritual beliefs and practices is relatively new and still developing.

An example of too little charity that stands out in our professional experience is what occurs when we suggest to superiors or other religious that they attend Alanon meetings. Alanon is a support group for families and friends of alcoholics that educates those who love someone suffering from this addictive disease about the nature of the illness. Alanon teaches people how they can cope with their own feelings about the illness and its effects on them and how they can help the chemically dependent person in their lives. When we have suggested that



major superiors or those who live in convents or rectories with alcoholics attend Alanon, everyone agrees that it is a good idea. To our knowledge, no one has ever yet followed through on this suggestion. Why?

There are many possible excuses, but it seems to us that the problem is too little charity. Some, obviously, care enough to point out a problem but feel imposed upon to do more about it than speak up. Others resent the implication that they are somehow responsible for the alcoholic's drinking or control of their illness. Even these explanations, however, do not account for the total resistance to Alanon attendance. Alanon meetings are uplifting, often spiritual, experiences. How is it, then, that clergy and religious never attend? It is not for a want of alcoholics in religious life. Perhaps, it is too little charity.

**Responsibility Must be Faced.** The question of who is responsible for what in a relationship is always difficult. Most would agree, however, that for a relationship to work it must be fifty-fifty, that is, a mutually shared responsibility. If one partner, then, has a problem or an illness, it inevitably involves the other person to some degree. Unfortunately, most people involved with someone who is sick would rather have the doctors and other health professionals take care of it. Illness, apparently, brings out very basic, primitive fears in most of us.

Saying that you have some responsibility in the disease process is a long way from saying that you have in any way *caused* the problem. More often you have merely been affected by the illness and avoided confrontation or responding judgmentally. What, then, is the responsibility of a fellow cleric or religious in the recovery of an alcoholic priest, brother, or sister with whom they live? Rarely do people see this as in any way a fifty-fifty proposition.

**Education Brings Understanding.** A critical aspect of being charitable to those who suffer mental and emotional illnesses is understanding. Most religious have sought out various forms of spiritual education, but in our experience, few have taken courses, attended workshops, or read books about psychotherapy, or talked to people who have required treatment for some form of mental illness. Many do not have even a basic concept of the various types or symptoms of emotional disorders. There appears to be the beginning of a trend now, however, toward increased awareness and understanding due, at least in part, to the increased expenditures by religious communities and dioceses for psychotherapy.

Not being educated about this aspect of human existence is, in our minds, the worst aspect of being not charitable enough. Since all of us encounter people with mental or emotional problems in our

families, friendships, acquaintances, and co-workers, it is not unreasonable to expect some level of education about our emotional lives and how they can go astray.

Basically, what is needed is an understanding of the "disease concept" of mental and emotional illnesses. What makes depression, psychosis, alcoholism, or outbursts of rage an illness? Alcoholics have struggled for a long time to eliminate the "moral" concept of the illness, i.e., that it is simply a failure of willpower. Other emotional diseases tend to have stigmas attached to them as well. If you question the truth of this, when was the last time you spoke to someone who told you that they had been in a psychiatric hospital? Many vowed religious have been hospitalized, but few admit to it publicly. Some widely known figures like Betty Ford have acknowledged problems with drugs or alcohol, but rarely does anyone reveal having had an emotional illness. Most serious mental illnesses have complex causes involving heredity, environment, and individual coping skills. Simply put, they are called diseases because they have an agreed upon set of symptoms, a predictable course, a variety of types of treatment, and a change in prognosis as a result of treatment. Is it expecting too much charity to ask that—in relation to alcoholism and mental illness—this "disease concept" be understood? Of course not. We hope it will soon be recognized as essential to understanding and helping those we live with as well as those we minister to.

**Positive Criticism Needed.** A form of being uncharitable that may have grown out of the experience of "chapter of faults" is the avoidance of feedback or positive criticism. Some religious felt so humiliated by public criticism that they have avoided being honest with each other at all costs. Usually, these were highly sensitive and insecure people. Some took the experience with a grain of salt and were able to be more flexible and resilient, whereas others took the process to heart and now seem to feel that it is their personal responsibility to judge and criticize their fellow religious. The latter group can be sarcastic, aloof, and condescending. They may express rigid, cruel, and demanding attitudes toward others. They do not allow for the inevitable humanness and imperfection of us all. Their lack of charity is usually more obvious and easier to criticize, but all of us need to learn to balance our caring and criticism in such a way that the latter is both gentle and honest.

**Some Fear Embarrassment.** An apparent lack of charity may be due to feelings of embarrassment. Most of us avoid situations in which we feel somehow inadequate or likely to be embarrassed. If major superiors and fellow religious lack education or fear responsibility, or both, they may avoid the confrontation of emotional problems that threaten



---

## The fear of embarrassment creates an apparent lack of charity on the part of major superiors and other religious

---

to bring out their lack of ability to understand or their avoidance of responsibility. A way of assessing whether the fear of embarrassment is making you uncharitable is to ask yourself whether you

would talk to the person's doctor or psychotherapist. The next question would be to ask yourself how often you ask for clear directions as to what to do in interacting with the person who is suffering from a mental or emotional illness. Most professionals welcome this form of consultation, but the fear of embarrassment creates an apparent lack of charity on the part of major superiors and other religious.

### BALANCED CHARITY HELPS

The priest profiled above reports doing well despite the existence of both too little and too much charity on the part of his bishop, diocesan officials, and brother priests. The sister discussed above recently celebrated her first year of sobriety. Others have not done as well. Many emotional illnesses are potentially life-threatening, most obviously in terms of suicide. We all need to learn how to move more decisively in relation to issues like responsibility, education, critical attitudes, and embarrassment. Christ calls us all to attempt to grow in love and to learn to temper charity so that it is neither too much nor too little. Learning to balance our charity better will mean that more persons will be helped in recovering from mental and emotional illnesses.

## New Studies Explore Mourning Process

**P**sychiatrist Mardi Horowitz, at the University of California Medical School at San Francisco, has just completed a new study of grief. In his recently published *Introduction to Psychodynamics* (Basic Books), this widely known authority on the process of mourning comprehensively discusses the typical behaviors and feelings related to grieving the death of a loved one and then details the way that mourning sometimes goes awry.

As reported by *The New York Times* health columnist Daniel Goleman, Horowitz has found that people in mourning who do not reach the stage of emotional acceptance of the death are likely to reveal "a marked inability to work, to be caring or creative, or even to experience pleasant feelings. They may be plagued by anxiety, depression, or rage, followed by shame or guilt."

You can tell that a person has completed the psychological work of mourning when they feel once again a sense of mastery of life. Writes Horowitz, "Although some grief persists, the mourner has decided that life can continue without the dead person. They're ready, for instance, to take on the risks of a new relationship—that they may be cherished, or abandoned and left."

Researchers have reported that certain kinds of deaths are more difficult to mourn adequately. Suicide is prominent among these. In *Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide* (Scribner's), psychologist Henry Seiden states, "In addition to suicide being a loss the survivor suffers, he also experiences it as an accusation of sorts—that his love was not good enough to keep the loved one alive, or that their relationship was not important enough to stay alive for." Seiden recommends to these usually silent survivors: "The best thing is to talk about it. Because they don't do much of what is normal to handle grief, they can stay stuck in feelings of guilt, anger, or shame for years."

Like a child's death, any sudden death can also make mourning difficult. Goleman recalls, "In a Harvard Medical School study, those whose spouses died with little or no warning were more anxious and depressed two to four years after the death than those whose spouses died from long illness." For most parents whose child has died, writes Chicago psychiatrist George Pollack, "mourning is never completed." Siblings, too, find a child's death difficult to mourn, and it is not uncommon for this difficulty to emerge only in the survivor's adulthood.



# Decision Making by Consensus

NANCY CONWAY, C.S.J., M.S.W., and JEAN ALVAREZ, Ed.D.

**A**s consultants to many religious congregations, we hear about consensus frequently. In chapter deliberations, in the work of leadership teams, in developing processes for corporate stands, we are often told that the group would like to make most of its decisions by consensus.

We have found ourselves reluctant to talk much about this topic or to develop special processes designed to move a divided group toward consensus, largely out of a sense that the concept is often misunderstood and overused. Recently, however, in facilitating a chapter, we experienced what was unmistakably a decision made by consensus. Unplanned, the steps emerging as we moved through it, it was stunning in its impact, in its feeling of "rightness," this unanimous decision that, had a vote been taken earlier in the process, would have been soundly defeated.

Many of us who went through that process have continued to describe it as one of the most profound experiences of our lives. As facilitators, we have discussed the process often and have read whatever materials we could find on consensus, trying to understand what made it possible and how those conditions could be recreated. We want to offer here the results of that discussion and reading.

First, let us briefly describe the process we experienced. This will provide for the reader, as it has for us, an actual situation to illustrate the concept. It will also explain why we have asked ourselves the questions we have and why we have come to some of our answers.

## AN EXAMPLE OF CONSENSUS

This situation occurred as a chapter body (twenty-five delegates and fifteen fully participating non-delegate members) considered offering its formal

support to the sanctuary movement. A proposal that the province offer sanctuary to refugees came to the chapter floor. It quickly became apparent that this proposal would not pass, but in the discussion, four other options were suggested. In order of riskiness they were as follows:

1. No action on this proposal.
2. We affirm those working in the sanctuary movement.
3. We support the sanctuary movement.
4. We endorse the sanctuary movement.

After some additional discussion of these options, a straw vote was taken to see if there was any agreement in the group. Although the majority of people preferred the two more cautious choices, the vote was spread, with some people selecting each option. This was difficult, because on all previous votes there had been near unanimity; as a result, the group decided to pursue the discussion a bit more, hoping that one of the choices would emerge as a clearer preference.

In the course of the discussion that followed, one of the hospital administrators in the group asked a question for which no one had an answer: "What are the legal and financial implications of making each of these decisions? For example, if the province endorses illegal actions, even though its own members may not engage in those actions, could the government refuse to reimburse our hospitals for Medicare costs?" Because the question required a factual answer rather than an opinion or belief, and because the administrator felt she could not be open to some of the options being discussed until she had an answer, the chapter recessed overnight while the congregation's and hospital's attorneys were consulted.



When the group reconvened (with the information that such government action would be illegal but nonetheless possible), the discussion continued without much apparent change in people's thinking. It appeared that a divided vote was inevitable, until one of the particularly influential members stood to say, "I have not been faithful in this process. I have been thinking about the security of the province rather than what the Spirit is asking of us. Please change my vote from option two to option four." In the moments that followed, it became clear that her comment had struck a responsive chord. Several other people also acknowledged that their preference in the straw vote had been a result more of their cost/benefit calculations than of their sincere regard for the Spirit's leading.

It would be impressive if we could report that a few minutes of quiet reflection was all that was required for consensus to emerge in the group. In fact, it took another two hours of careful discussion, questioning, and reflection before that point was reached. We continued to spend time on the process because whenever we paused to test for consensus, we found that more people had moved toward the riskiest position, that of endorsing the sanctuary movement. This indicated to us that something was continuing to happen, and persuaded us not to rush to a vote.

Several moments from those last two hours illustrate patterns that must be nurtured if consensus is to be developed. The first involved a wise and well-read older member, whose opinions generally carried great weight in chapter discussions. As the group continued to shift toward option four, she said, "I just don't feel right about the way the group is moving. I think I could be more open if someone would answer this question for me. . . ." Her choice to ask rather than tell and her acknowledgement that the problem might lie in her caution rather than in the group's recklessness touched people deeply and served as a model for how to explore one's hesitations with respect to the group.

A second critical moment occurred when one member explained why she felt unable to move her vote to option four: "I don't think I can say that I endorse the sanctuary movement unless I intend to be active within it. Realistically I know that I can't do that in the foreseeable future, so although I value what is happening here in the group, I don't think I can honestly change my vote." Her concern led the group to examine just what was implied by an individual's saying yes to option four. The clarification that resulted enabled her to say yes, as she felt that her position was well within the understanding reached by the group.

A last critical moment came when one person who still felt that her own preference would be to move more cautiously stated, "I would need quite

a bit more time to be sure of my own yes to option four." Asked how she wanted the group to deal with her inability to say yes at this point (should they wait? should they vote?), she replied, "I wouldn't vote for option four if we took a vote, but it's clear to me that what has happened here is the work of the Spirit. I can easily consent to that decision."

At that point we paused for a moment's centering and then asked, "Have we reached consensus that we will endorse the sanctuary movement?" The response was a unanimous "Yes!"

## CONSENSUS DEFINED

In *Quaker Spirituality*, Douglas Steere provides an apt description of the consensus-seeking process:

Something that might be called participative humility in the assembled members is certainly required in the Quaker decision-making process for it to be able to operate effectively. In this process, whose decision I have been willing to accept, I am brought to realize that the matter has been carefully and patiently considered. I have been involved throughout the process and have had a chance at different stages in it of making my point of view known to the groups and of having it seriously considered and weighed. Even if the decision that the group feels drawn to accept may go against what I initially proposed, I know that my contribution has helped to sift the issue, perhaps to temper it, and in the course of the process, I may have come to see it somewhat differently. . . .

If I am a seasoned Friend, I no longer oppose that decision. I give it my *nihil obstat* and I emerge from the meeting not as a member of a minority who feels outflanked and rejected but rather as one who has been through the process of the decision and is willing to abide by it even though my accent would not have put it in this form.

Because consensus is such a positive value for many groups these days, we often find the term employed to fit processes not characterized by consensus, in the sense in which we are defining the term. This may enable a group to feel good about itself, but it robs the group of the invitation to be part of a very precious experience such as the one described above. We find that there are three variant uses of the term.

1. *Any instance when all happen to agree on a topic is a consensus.* We would call this *agreement* rather than *consensus*, since it lacks the aspect of laboring together to reach that agreement.

2. *A unanimous vote is a consensus.* Whereas a vote ordinarily concludes a process that may have involved a great deal of discussion, the flavor of the process is quite different from the flavor when consensus is sought. In a voting process, participants may assume an adversarial style, seeking to persuade those who are undecided; in a consensus-seeking process, participants view themselves as allies, searching together for the truth. Because they



are allies, they listen with care and openness in order to understand the concerns of both those who are undecided and those with whom they are inclined to disagree.

3. *A large majority represents a consensus.* We have worked with groups that described their decisions as “90-percent consensus” or “75-percent consensus.” This practice glorifies a simple vote by calling it “consensus” and is damaging to the integrity of those who voted in the minority. It is the nature of a 90-percent–10-percent vote that 10 percent of the voters did *not* consent to the decision. It is much more honest, and more respectful of the minority, to call that decision a “90-percent majority.”

## USE OF CONSENSUS PROCESS

There are five elements that should be present in a situation or should be characteristic of the topic if a consensus process is to be used.

First, a consensus process is valuable in situations in which the *way* the decision is made is almost as important as the content of the decision itself. Consensus shows respect for each participant and a desire to have each one feel satisfied with the decision; thus, a group that needs or wants to affirm these values can benefit from the process.

Second, the question being considered should be a significant one. It takes time to develop consensus, even on simple questions, so the process should only be used when the value to be gained justifies the use of that much time. When consensus processes are overused, participants may grow to resent the demand on their time and may become unwilling to invest themselves even in an appropriate case.

A third and related issue is that the group making the decision should have the power to make the final decision. Because of the time that is spent in building consensus, it would be terribly frustrating for a midlevel group to make a decision by consensus, only to have it reversed at the next level. For this reason, in group processes that have subgroups discussing a topic and then passing their insights on to be combined with those of other subgroups, we never ask those groups to try to reach consensus. Instead, we have them pass on majority and minority viewpoints, because we find that working for consensus produces such commitment to the outcome that it is hard for the subgroup to let its ideas be changed in the combining process at the next level.

Fourth, each member of the group must have approximately the same amount of power, so that all may be sure that the decision will emerge from a mutual searching, not from insistence or undue influence on the part of one member. This makes consensus particularly appropriate for groups like chapters, institutional administrations, or any group that seeks to function as a team. We have recently worked with a high school committee whose mem-

---

## One must free oneself from a competitive orientation, from the tendency to view the process in terms of winning and losing sides

---

bers are teachers and students. Because in their committee roles they are defined as equals, they have chosen to try to make their decisions by consensus, although they are aware that the students will need to be very strong and the teachers very self-controlled in order to overcome the inequality in their ages and roles. In this case, the committee has decided that the process of decision making by consensus is *so* important that they are willing to place great personal demands on themselves in order to enable the process to work.

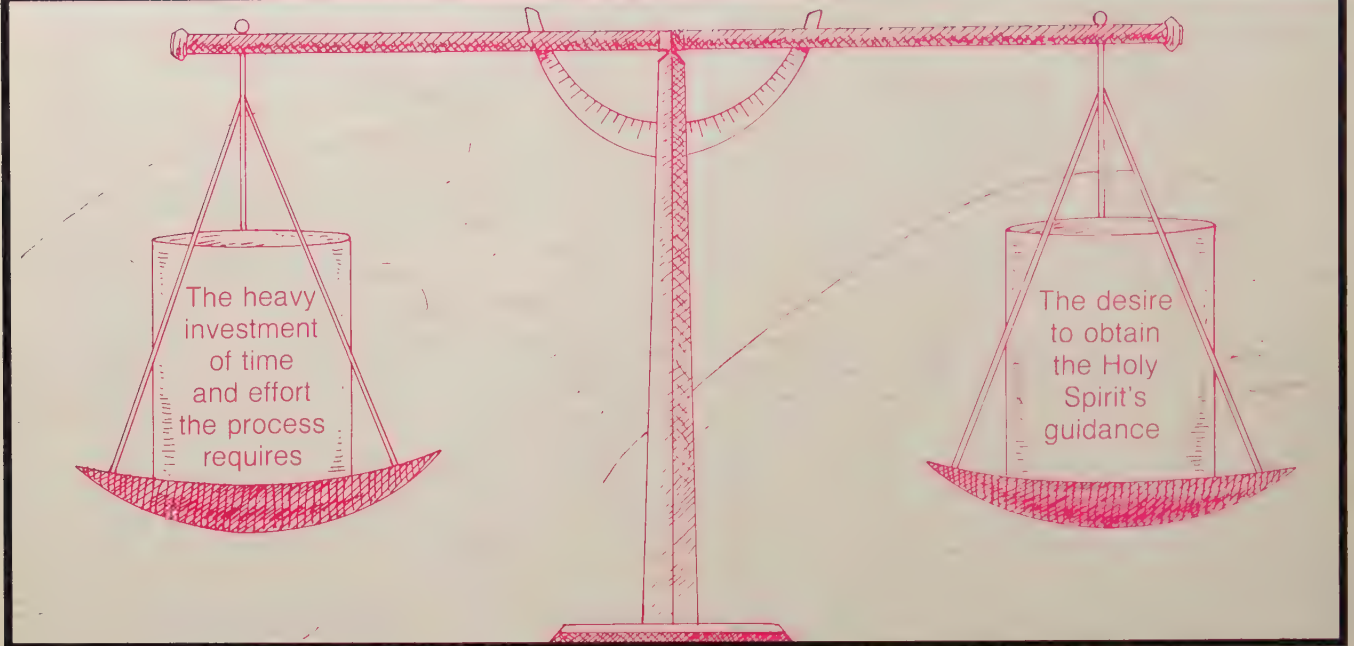
Finally, the issue under consideration must be one regarding which participants are not locked into absolute, mutually exclusive beliefs. In opting to seek consensus, they are agreeing to examine the areas between and around their initial positions, and this of course will only be possible if they can imagine modifying their thinking. One implication of this is that the seeking of consensus, like discernment, is never appropriate for situations in which participants perceive themselves to be choosing between good and bad positions. A participant who believes that her initial position is right and the other positions are wrong cannot, and probably should not, seek to explore all other options as if they were potentially the right choice.

## GROUP MUST BE PREPARED

The group itself must be ready, that is, there must be proper climate, skills, orientation, and infor-



# One of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Religious Consensus Seeker



mation present in order for the process to succeed with a minimum of frustration. Perhaps the most essential element in the group's climate is the absence of factions. This will be an obstacle for many religious congregations, which are still caught in the divisions that were probably inevitable as groups moved through renewal. In those congregations, where small group loyalties are strong and boundaries firm, members will probably not feel enough freedom to recognize the truth that may be found in another group's insights. For us, one of the most striking things about the chapter that was considering sanctuary was that in the six months we had worked with them we had certainly spotted friendship groups but had not managed to identify factions. As one test of readiness to engage in a process of consensus, then, members might ask themselves, "Am I open to the viewpoint of each other participant, able to search for and accept the truth that may be found there?"

Because in seeking consensus the process is presumed to be as important as the outcome, the group must be willing to invest time in creating the necessary climate of trust and respect as well as spend time addressing the topic itself. They must value the pauses to reflect and to comment on how they are working together as much as they value the examination of the content. A positive climate can overcome a great deal of unclarity of

thought, but no amount of clear thinking can offset a climate of mistrust.

Related to this is the question of skills. Good will and commitment alone can do wonders in creating the climate of trust, but the climate will be productive only if participants have the skills to benefit from it. So, another essential for groups is the readiness to put time and effort into the development of excellent communication and conflict-resolution skills. We find that the renewal years provided many groups with good communication patterns but that the ability to stay with a conflict until a mutually satisfactory solution is reached is rare indeed. The Harvard Negotiation Project has produced a wonderful resource, the book *Getting to Yes*, for groups who would like to develop this skill.

With respect to orientation, the participants must be willing to care about the feelings of all people in the group as well as about the content of the decision. This was well illustrated by the group considering the sanctuary movement, when the process was slowed down to address one individual's feeling that she could not say yes unless she could personally commit to action in support of that position. It would have been easier, and might have been faster, to respond, "Don't worry about it—we don't expect you to take action." By focusing on the individual's feelings, however, the group both validated the individual and also anticipated hes-



itations that were probably present in others but were as yet un verbalized.

On the other hand, the group must also be committed to seeking a solution to the question under consideration. It is inevitable that there will be at least some moments when the group feels at odds. Some members will be frustrated and impatient. A group that attends to feelings to the exclusion of the issue at hand may become paralyzed at this point, unable to tolerate the discomfort that usually accompanies parts of the process.

Finally, even if a group meets all of the above preconditions, it may still not be prepared to seek consensus on a particular issue. This is because the climate, skills, and orientation of the group must be supplemented by adequate information on the topic being considered. In the situation described above, although it was not necessary for every member to be an expert on Central America, the process could not legitimately have been undertaken if the members had not had a basic awareness of the situation there. If a group wants to reach a consensus regarding the future of one of its owned or sponsored institutions, every participant must feel that he or she has enough information to join in making the best possible decision. It is not uncommon, therefore, for a group to wait before entering into the process, or to recess in midprocess, so that members can seek out and digest the information they lack.

## HELPFUL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Participants should try to distinguish facts from opinions, particularly when making statements of their own, but also when listening to others. They should try to identify and name feelings, both their own and others'. Feelings inevitably affect a process like this, but their effect can be helpful, rather than distorting, if they are considered openly so that participants are *choosing* the weight that will be given to them. Conciseness when speaking is important; it is conducive to a willingness to listen on the part of others.

Participants should encourage others to take part, by seeking the viewpoint of quieter members, and they should try to understand the viewpoint of each person, regardless of whether they think they agree or disagree with them. This requires listening with an attitude that asks, "What is true about what this person is saying?" rather than "What is wrong with this idea?"

One must free oneself from a competitive orientation, from the tendency to view the process in terms of winning and losing sides. The attitude that arrival at consensus signals a success *for the group*, not for a particular point of view, enables the participant to be enthusiastic about the outcome, regardless of the position that she or he had originally taken. Participants must know that they

---

**Whereas the positions  
may be mutually  
exclusive, the values  
that lead participants  
to take those positions  
usually are not**

---

are strong enough to say no to the group if the emerging decision is one to which they cannot give their consent. Because they know that they *could* say no to the group's decision, the yes that they are more likely to say will be experienced as freely given, not coerced.

## FACILITATOR CAN HELP

In addition to the usual skills needed by any facilitator (keeping the group focused on the topic, ensuring that all viewpoints are heard, encouraging good communication patterns, synthesizing, adapting the process so that it serves the group's needs), the person guiding a consensus process needs to be prepared to make certain particular kinds of interventions. The most crucial, and common, of the facilitator's tasks is to listen for and articulate to the group the values being addressed by different participants. The principal insight of *Getting to Yes* is that conflict generally results from people reiterating mutually exclusive positions on an issue. Whereas the positions may be mutually exclusive, the values that lead participants to take those positions usually are not. If the values can be identified and discussed, a solution that honors all the values can often be devised. A good facilitator paves the way for the discussion to move to this level.

The facilitator must be alert to growing areas of agreement, to issues that must be resolved before consensus can be reached, and to new ideas that, if explored, may offer possible resolution. She or he helps the group avoid moving to closure too quickly—before members feel truly at ease with their solution—while continuing to offer solutions and test for consensus so that the group does not merely spin its wheels.

Finally, the facilitator helps the group determine



whether it has reached consensus, especially when the topic has been discussed at length but without the participants being in total agreement. At this point, those in the minority may feel able to consent to the majority viewpoint, even if they do not entirely agree with it. For example, in the process described above, the last delegate would probably not have said yes to endorsing sanctuary, even if the discussion had continued for several more days, and yet she was willing to consent to that decision. It is the facilitator's responsibility to check periodically the status of those in disagreement, asking, "Do you have any suggestions for how the group should proceed at this point?" It is essential to the integrity of the process that those in the minority feel as free to say "I know I will not be able to consent to this, so I think we should vote" as to say "I can consent" or "I'd like some more discussion, particularly about. . . ."

## VARIOUS OUTCOMES POSSIBLE

When a group decides to work toward consensus on a particular topic there is, of course, no guarantee that they will be successful. Knowing that there are other valid outcomes and that these do not signify failure frees the group from trying to force a consensus where one does not exist. We suggest that the group decide ahead of time what it will do if consensus cannot be reached. Some groups decide that they will do nothing unless there is consensus. Others view that reaction as being too supportive of the status quo, as placing too much power in the hands of the minority. (For example, had this been the decision of the group considering the sanctuary movement, and thirty-nine members had wanted to endorse sanctuary and one had not, they would have followed the reservations of the one.) A second alternative is to agree that if consensus cannot be reached within a certain period of time, the group will vote. In this case it is helpful to have decided ahead of time what percentage will be required to affirm the decision.

With these ground rules agreed to, the group can proceed with its effort to reach consensus and can expect one of the following outcomes. The group may reach a unanimous decision. Or, the group may not reach total agreement, but those in the minority may consent to the decision of the majority. In a third outcome, the group may not reach total agreement or consensus, but following agreed-on procedures may take a vote and accept its conclusion. This option allows those in the minority to register their disagreement with the majority viewpoint more strongly than does the previous option, while still permitting the group to move ahead with a decision. This is a particularly appropriate solution when the group is operating under time pressure. Perhaps an individual does not feel sufficiently at ease with the decision being made to

consent to it, yet does not have severe objections. With more time this person might feel able to consent, but lacking that time feels his or her difference must be registered.

The final possible outcome occurs in situations where a participant has serious objections to the decision being considered. In this case, the participant may block the decision (depending on the prior agreement reached by the group, this would generally override even a strong majority vote). Because of the power this gives to a single individual in a process so respectful of the interaction among the group, this option must only be exercised with the greatest caution. It is, however, very appropriate within certain circumstances. If an individual becomes convinced that the group is acting not in response to leading by the Spirit but in response to momentum, or charisma, or perhaps guilt, a decision to block the group's action is fully consistent with the process itself. Because the process honors the movement of the Spirit in each individual and in their collective reflection, the group must remember that the one person who follows the Spirit's leading to block the decision has as great a possibility of pointing the way to clearness as did the person who first suggested the position toward which most of them have now moved.

Looking back at the preconditions and the multiple steps we have suggested here, we are tempted to wonder whether a consensus-seeking process is really worth the time and effort it requires. Perhaps the best answer comes from the province that considered sanctuary. Several months after that provincial chapter was concluded, the entire congregation considered taking a corporate stand on the question of sanctuary. Of the four provinces, which all participated in a preparation period involving input and discussion, only the one that had previously engaged in the process of consensus voted in favor of the corporate stand. We are not saying, of course, that every time a decision is reached by consensus the result is a yes; at times the Spirit may be leading just as clearly toward a no. The difference, however, in response between this province and the other three strongly suggests that the time and effort spent in seeking consensus had in fact had a significant impact on their thinking.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Avery, M., B. Auvine, B. Streibel, and L. Weiss. *Building United Judgment: A Handbook for Consensus Decision Making*. Madison, Wisconsin: The Center for Conflict Resolution, 1981.
- Drake, M. "Beyond Consensus: The Quaker Search for God's Leading for the Group." *Friends Journal* 32, no. 10 (1987):12-14.
- Fisher, R., and W. Ury. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
- Steere, D., ed. *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1984.



---

---

# BOOK REVIEWS

---

**Home Away From Home: The Art of Self-Sabotage**, by Janet Geringer Woititz, Ed. D. Pompano Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1987. 160 pp. \$13.95.

---

**I**n *Home Away From Home*, Janet Woititz (*Adult Children of Alcoholics*, 1983, and *Struggle for Intimacy*, 1985) moves her groundbreaking research on adult children of alcoholics to the workplace. In this latest publication, Woititz has two audiences in view. First, she addresses employers in the hopes of educating them to the cost effectiveness of employee assistance programs (EAPs) for children of alcoholics (CoA's). Second, she speaks to the CoA's themselves and provides helpful information about how the characteristic patterns that developed in them as they were raised in homes where there was active alcoholism are manifested in work situations.

Part one, "On the Job," answers questions that would be those of employers and those of employers and employees who are CoA's. After an effective use of stories from CoA's in different professions, Woititz explains the overall tendency to maintain self-sabotaging behavior and feeling patterns in the workplace. Adult children of alcoholics have a way of reproducing their alcoholic family system, thus creating "the home away from home." Woititz then describes the reaction of CoA's as employees and as supervisors. The chapter on boundaries is particularly insightful in describing the CoA's struggle with appropriate closeness and distance in work relationships. Workaholism and burnout are treated in a way that enables us to see how CoA's are particularly susceptible to both. The brief section on changing jobs focuses on the CoA fear of change as a fear of both success and failure. It conveys the extraordinary anxiety suffered in employment shifts because adult children of alcoholics have peculiar

gaps in their decision-making skills. The overview summary of the basic CoA characteristics is necessary for those unfamiliar with Woititz's earlier works. Its concrete portrayal of how keenly dysfunctional behaviors affect performance and satisfaction for CoA's no matter what their level of success is helpful for all readers.

The briefer second part of the book, "Developing Healthy Patterns," shifts from the problem to the solution. Woititz offers adult children of alcoholics concrete ways of developing healthy work relationships and outlines steps for finding the right job. Her insights on CoA's as counseling professionals are keen appraisals of both their strengths and weaknesses. Only the most schematic of thoughts for employee assistance programs are suggested at the end. A lengthy appendix of the research tables and figures used in developing the book is included as corroborating evidence to prompt consideration of appropriate employee assistance programs.

At first the book seems to confuse its audiences. On second thought, however, perhaps it reflects reality. Woititz is well aware that her audiences are mixed. Some of the employers and EAP practitioners she is addressing are also CoA's who need first to recognize the problem in themselves before they can effectively treat the compulsive behavior of employees seeking help.

The story of the CoA priest (pp. 10-12) as well as the description of CoA's as counseling professionals are especially apt for readers of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*. Awareness of the pervasive effects of alcoholism in the family and its life-long consequences is necessary for all who work in any way in religious formation, spiritual direction, and counseling. Woititz's clear presentation of both the value and the vulnerability of adult children of alcoholics makes her book helpful in this crucial area of human and spiritual growth. It can assist those in religious life and church leadership to recognize and to heal the wounds they find in their ministries and in themselves.

—Phyllis H. Kaminski, S.S.N.D.



---

**To Love as God Loves**, by Roberta C. Bondi. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. 111 pp. \$5.95.

---

**I**t is almost as refreshing to find the Desert Fathers a source for contemporary human exploration as to find them a source for the development of popular piety. This book serves both functions. The author is deeply versed in modern psychology and cultural analysis and is an established patristic scholar. Happily, this book suffers from neither the psychologized sentimentalism nor the pedantic elitism that could so easily mar such an ambitious task.

*To Love as God Loves* is an interpretation of some key themes of the Desert Fathers—and Mothers where she can find them—for the contemporary lay person. The book is designed to be read by the non-scholarly Christian who has deep commitments to the spiritual life but not the time or resources for careful patristic criticism and research. For this reason the book reads more like a dialogue with the Fathers as living directors than as a compendium of quotations and teachings. While the vol-

ume is replete with stories, spiritual advice, and direct citations, the style of the discussion places them both in the context of their time and with relevance to the situations of the readers.

It is inspiring to see how these texts can be made to come alive for lay persons and spiritual readers who would be unfamiliar with the ascetical language common to those formed in the classical religious life. The appropriateness of monastic spiritual reflection and vision of prayer for the married person and busy American is bridged in creative and credible ways.

Chapters on prayer, humility, the passions, love, and God are designed to give easy access to the way the human being and his or her relationship with God, self, and others were understood in the third and fourth centuries. The various human passions are presented in a manner that both interprets the ancient texts and aids the modern Christian who is striving for personal development.

Although the volume is brief, the reflection it evokes will make it a useful resource for retreat, spiritual direction, and introduction to the Desert Fathers and classical ascetical theological themes. I am hopeful that the author will continue to bring such rich resources from tradition into the contemporary Christian spiritual struggle.

—Brother Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C.

## Health Care Needs Revision

**D**escribing "The Health-Care Chaos" in *The New York Times Magazine*, Joseph A. Califano, Jr., a former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, wrote recently: "Of the \$550 billion Americans spend [annually] on health care, less than 0.3 percent is spent on health promotion and disease prevention. Government employees, schools, doctors and other health professionals—all have an interest in marketing health promotion with the same sophisticated saturation the ad agencies employ to sell products. The priorities are clear: quitting smoking, sticking to a proper diet, controlling drinking, taking regular exercise, learning to handle stress, practicing preventative care, and having regular check-ups."

Califano regrets that "patients have come to judge physicians by how much doctors do to them—how spectacular their diagnostic and treatment procedures are, how high-tech their offices and hospitals are... We must reeducate patients, promoting a cultural shift in patient attitudes. One way to begin is to pay doctors to *talk* to their patients, and to persuade patients that fees for that service are often better spent than those paying only for doctors to 'do something' to them."

This shift, admits Califano, "must be achieved among a generation of Americans who pop tranquilizers not to relieve unusual stress but to subject themselves to even more; who rely on pills rather than self-discipline to avoid obesity, to relax, to sleep."



# Memo

**From: A Child**

**To: Parents (Teachers please notice, too.)**

1. Don't spoil me. I know quite well that I ought not to have all I ask for—I'm only testing you.
2. Don't be afraid to be firm with me. I prefer it; it makes me feel secure.
3. Don't let me form bad habits. I have to rely on you to detect them in the early stages.
4. Don't make me feel smaller than I am. It only makes me behave stupidly "big."
5. Don't correct me in front of people if you can help it. I'll take much more notice if you talk quietly with me in private.
6. Don't make me feel that my mistakes are sins. It upsets my sense of values.
7. Don't protect me from consequences. I need to learn the painful way sometimes.
8. Don't be too upset when I say "I hate you." Sometimes it isn't you I hate but your power to thwart me.
9. Don't take too much notice of my small ailments. Sometimes they get me the attention I need.
10. Don't nag. If you do, I shall have to protect myself by appearing deaf.
11. Don't forget that I cannot explain myself as well as I should like. That is why I am not always accurate.
12. Don't put me off when I ask questions. If you do, you will find that I stop asking and seek my information elsewhere.
13. Don't be inconsistent. That completely confuses me and makes me lose faith in you.
14. Don't tell me my fears are silly. They are terribly real and you can do much to reassure me if you try to understand.
15. Don't ever suggest that you are perfect or infallible. It gives me too great a shock when I discover that you are neither.
16. Don't ever think that it is beneath your dignity to apologize to me. An honest apology makes me feel surprisingly warm toward you.
17. Don't forget I love experimenting. I couldn't get along without it, so please put up with it.
18. Don't forget how quickly I am growing up. It must be very difficult for you to keep pace with me, but please try.
19. Don't forget that I don't thrive without lots of love and understanding, but I don't need to tell you, do I?
20. Please keep yourself fit and healthy. I need you.

(Author unknown)



## An Invitation to Contribute

**T**he editors of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** have a new project in mind. We have been asked to prepare a book that will be useful especially to religious formation personnel. We would hope it would also be helpful to religious superiors, spiritual directors, church leaders, educators, and parents. It will contain the kind of theoretical and practical information that will enable its readers to become as effective as possible in fostering the full human growth of those in their care.

With a title something like *A Handbook for Formation Personnel*, the book will focus on the principal skills a person would want to learn quickly when he or she takes on the task of facilitating the development of others. We intend that it will present the most up-to-date concepts and how-to-do-it steps that we can describe. Unlike most books that include only the contents their writers consider valuable, it is our hope that this handbook will deal with the topics, issues, problems, and questions that you, our readers, would want the volume to examine and answer.

Consequently, we are asking you to help us construct this book. Picture yourself being assigned to take charge of the formation program for the young and not-so-young entrants into a novitiate or seminary anywhere from Chicago to Bangkok. Think about what you would like to find in a handbook that could be useful to you. Or, if you are now or have been personally involved in the work of religious formation, please write down the issues and questions that seem most important for new formation personnel to prepare themselves to face. Send us, if you will, those topics and questions, and perhaps the names of some people you think could write authoritatively about them out of their successful experience in formation work.

Thank you for considering this request. We need your help to make this handbook as helpful as possible to those who will read it and apply its contents in places around the world. We know there is need for such a project. Please join us in making it a reality.

Very gratefully yours,

Linda D. Amadeo, R.N., M.S.  
Executive Editor  
42 Kirkland Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138